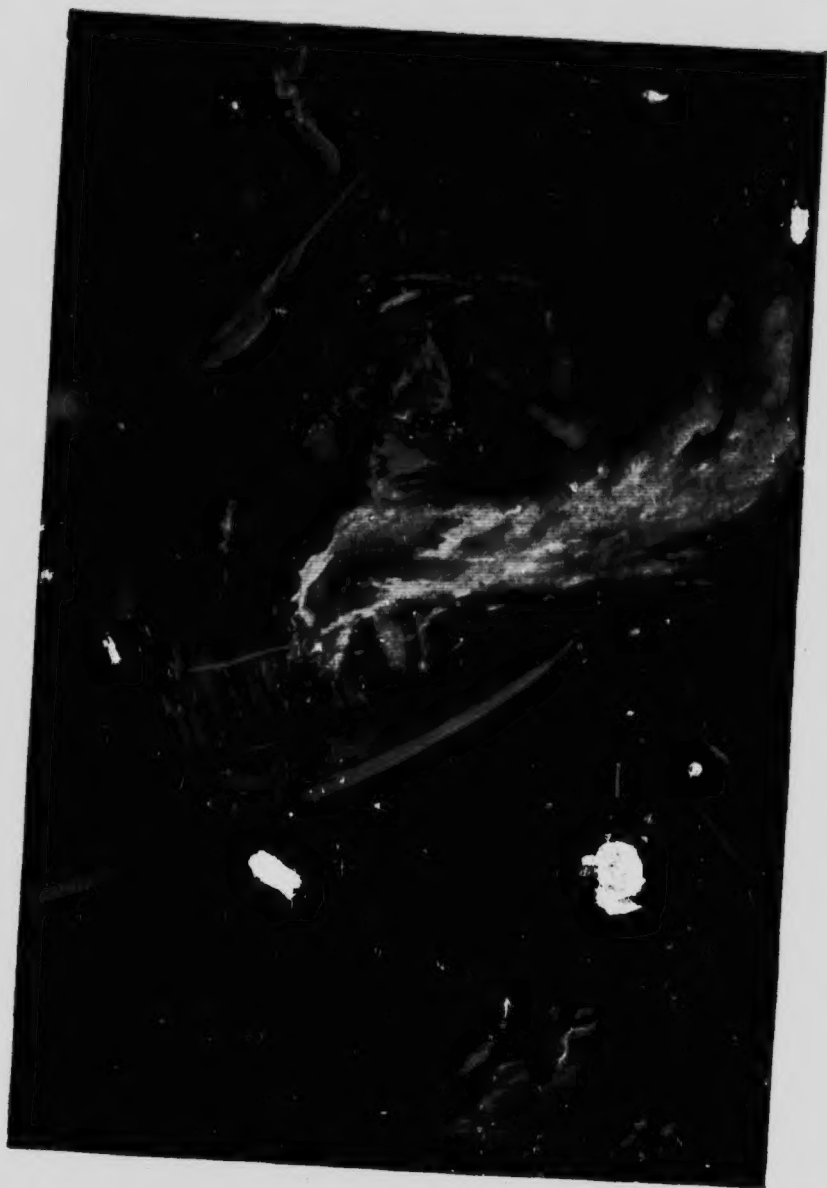


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"Uttering his death-shriek the Iroquois plunged overboard "
(see page 64).

IRON HEART

WAR CHIEF OF THE IROQUOIS

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

Author of "The Three Arrows," "The Dragon of the Skies," "The
Cruise of the 'Deerfoot,'" "Fire, Snow and Water," etc. etc.

WITH A COLOUR FRONTISPIECE AND
FOUR BLACK-AND-WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS

THIRTEENTH THOUSAND

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IRON HEART

WAR CHIEF OF THE IROQUOIS

CHAPTER I.

ON THE CATSUGA.

"**T**HERE seems to be strange goings-on to-night," muttered Orris Ouden, holding the paddle of his canoe motionless and looking sharply from the right to the left bank of the Catsuga; "I knowed the varmints was pretty thick in this part of the country, but just now they seem to be plentier than ever."

The autumn night had closed over forest and river, and the famous scout had already ascended the winding stream for nearly a dozen miles, his senses on the alert for signs of the fierce Iroquois, who had dug up the hatchet once more and rushed upon the war-path.

He could have made better progress by leaving the stream altogether and striking through the woods for his destination, which was still several miles up country, but he had a twofold purpose in keeping to his canoe, the chief of which was that he had been directed by General Greenfield to follow the river with a view to learning about the red men that were reported to be gathering in force along its banks.

It was risky business, but Orris Ouden had been accustomed to such work all his life, and had never yet shrunk from any duty imposed upon him by his superiors. He was in the prime of vigorous manhood, tall, active, powerful, and one to whom the subtle language of the woods was as legible as are these words to you.

He welcomed the gathering shadows, for he was familiar with the devious turnings of the river, and, feeling secure against discovery by his vigilant enemies, he could advance with greater swiftness between the wooded shores.

Ouden had more than one narrow escape from detection, but he was confident that up

to this hour, when night was fully come, none of the Iroquois had discovered him. Now, however, at the moment when he hoped the easiest part of his task was before him, he awoke to the fact that his canoe journey was ended, or at least interrupted for the time.

That which caused the exclamation with which my story opens was the sight that met his view as he rounded a sharp bend in the Catsuga. Only a brief distance above was not one, but two camp fires burning on opposite sides of the river, and so close to the margin that the first glance of the scout showed the glow of light spanning the entire stream.

To ascend any further in his boat would compel him to cross the arc of illumination caused by the blaze and expose him to certain detection from the Indians on both shores.

Furthermore, each fire had been started at the most favourable point by the red men; that is, there was no vegetation on either side dense enough to allow the boat to run in close to land and steal by without detection.

That the Iroquois had kindled the fires for

the purpose of preventing anyone going up or down was too clear to leave a moment's doubt. Orris ceased the noiseless swaying of his paddle and debated with himself the best course to adopt.

He had determined to go several miles further up the Catsuga, and was not one to be stopped by such an obstacle as now presented itself.

Such men, like officers in battle, are quick to reach decisions.

"Wal," he said to himself, with a low chuckle, "when a chap can't go through a thing he's got to go round it, and if them Iroquois think, 'cause they've started one fire on the right bank and t'other on the left, that Orris Ouden will turn back and give up the job, why there's where they make a mistake."

One powerful sweep of the paddle sent the canoe to the right, the nose running against the bushes with a rustling so soft that it would not have startled an Indian scout on the watch but a few paces distant. In a second the tall figure stepped out, and a minute later his strong arms raised the craft in an inverted

position over his head, where it looked like some odd-shaped umbrella as he moved off in the woods.

His only extra luggage, as it may be termed, consisted of his rifle and paddle, which he deftly secured over his shoulder, so as to leave his arms comparatively free. The task of carrying the canoe through the woods at night without the least light was anything but easy, when it is remembered that it was necessary to do so in silence to avoid detection by the watchful Iroquois.

Ouden partly overcame the difficulty by striking so deep into the forest that when he changed his course and headed up stream he was without any fear that a slip would bring his vengeful enemies down upon him.

He moved with the care and skill that had become a second nature to him. It was inevitable that the sharp front of the boat should catch now and then in the overhanging limbs, while occasionally his shoes struck some of the wiry vines running along the ground; but all this was expected and did not interfere with that imperturbable coolness which was

one of the strongest characteristics of the frontiersman.

By and by he turned to the left, toward the river that he had left some time before, advancing with the steady surety of one who feels no misgivings as to his footsteps.

Sure enough, at the very point where he anticipated, he paused on the edge of the stream, and, stooping carefully, placed his canoe in the water. He had flanked the danger-point, and was prepared to continue his voyage up stream.

But Orris Ouden was not quite ready to do so; he wanted a little more information about the war parties below.

Accordingly he left the craft with its paddle lying against the bank, while he turned about, rifle in hand, and picked his way down the Catsuga, with the resolve that the knowledge he wished should be gained without delay.

You will see the delicacy of this task, but it was in a line with the duties to which the scout had given his whole life, and there was no shrinking or hesitation on his part.

It required but a short time for him to ascertain there were about thirty Iroquois on that side of the stream, under the famous chieftain Iron Heart, one of the fiercest and most daring leaders that ever belonged to that extraordinary confederation of American Indians known as the Six Nations. He was a Seneca who became famous while a mere youth by his exploits in desolating our frontier, and he showed a wealth of resources in guiding his dusky warriors in their forays against the whites that made his name dreaded above all his contemporaries.

His presence here was proof that he commanded not only the party on the right, but those on the left bank, who, from the glimpses Ouden was able to secure, seemed as numerous as the band under his immediate eye.

It was with a certain admiration that the scout from the depth of the wood fixed his gaze on the wonderful young chieftain, whom he had seen many a time. The warriors were lolling about in almost every variety of attitude, some seated on a fallen tree, several busy preparing the choice parts of a deer for a meal,

others smoking, two or three half-reclining and half-sitting on the ground, with no apparent interest in anything, while a couple kept near the edge of the water, as though on the watch for parties that were expected to go up or down the stream.

Iron Heart had assumed, without premeditation, a posture at once picturesque, striking and graceful—made all the more so by the glow of the crackling camp fire, which bathed his face, breast and limbs in light, bringing his handsome figure out in as full relief as at noonday.

The chieftain was leaning his left shoulder slightly against the trunk of a large oak, his arms folded, his left leg resting lightly on the toe of the foot, the leg below the knee crossing the same portion of the right in front, so as to form an attitude that was natural under the circumstances. His head was partially bent, as though he was looking at something in the middle of the river.

The pose and figure of the Seneca were perfect. He was lithe, graceful, active and powerful. Even the daubs of paint on his

countenance could not hide its handsome lineaments. The long, luxuriant, raven hair, with the cluster of brilliant eagle feathers projecting from the crown, the hunting-shirt with its stained fringe, leggings, moccasins, the belt at the waist, with knife and tomahawk thrust within—these were but the striking points of one of the finest specimens of the American Indian that “E’er clinched fingers in a captive’s hair.”

“He’s a wonderful fellow,” muttered Orris Ouden, who stood for several minutes with his eyes on the savage beauty, “and when I know what he’s done agin us white folks I don’t wonder that all the Six Nations rank him as the equal of any they’ve ever had. Iron Heart, you and me hain’t met yet in a squar’ stand-up fight, but I shouldn’t wonder if we done so one of these days, and when we do, if I ain’t mightily mistook, the fur will fly.”

The scout smiled grimly at his conceit, and began a steady retrogression, with the intention of returning to his canoe and continuing his voyage up stream ; but he had taken less

than half a dozen paces when he became aware that some one was near him.

It would seem that if the scout was able to detect the presence of another so close at hand the stranger ought to be equally prompt in discerning his whereabouts. Such, as a matter of course, would have been the case had the white man been less circumspect in his movements, but the present instance was only one of those in which he made it an invariable rule to guide every muscle with the care that he would have displayed had he known his mortal enemies to be on every hand. Had not such a law governed Orris Ouden's conduct for years it may be set down as certain that he never would have been on the Catsuga on this pleasant night in autumn a long time ago.

CHAPTER II.

FINE WORK.

THE same moment that Orris Ouden learned that a stranger was at hand, he was convinced that he was unaware of the scout's presence. Placing himself close to the trunk of a large oak, where if necessary he could shift his position in absolute quiet, he calmly waited for the danger to pass. His wonderfully fine sense of hearing located the other when his equally trained vision was unable to outline him. The Indian was approaching from up stream, and a faint misgiving troubled the scout that he might have discovered the canoe resting against the bank, though the probabilities were against that being the case.

The Iroquois paused so near Ouden that, without stirring or inclining his body, he could have delivered a blow that would have sent the warrior spinning a dozen feet away.

The temptation to do so was strong, but the white man restrained himself, and the red-skin never knew how narrowly he escaped being driven into the middle of the succeeding week, as the expression goes.

Having passed below the watcher, the other was now between him and the camp fire where the rest of the Iroquois were gathered. There was just enough glow for Ouden to detect the head and shoulders of the savage, who was moving with a carelessness that proved he had not the remotest thought of danger.

The hunter could distinguish the gaudy head-dress, the luxuriant hair, the broad shoulders thrown slightly forward, and even the body to the waist. There could be no doubt that one of the long arms which hung at his side supported his rifle, though the weapon was invisible in the gloom.

The warrior pushed on with the same moderate gait until he joined his companions by the camp fire. Then Ouden followed him stealthily, until he gained a view of his features and could watch his movements. He saw the new arrival walk to where Iron Heart

was standing and address him. The young chief turned his head, but still inclined his body against the oak, and showed no special interest in what was said to him. The object of the scout was to learn, if possible, whether the warrior had anything to report about the canoe only a short distance off, or, what was still more important, whether he brought any news of the Morris family up stream.

The words that passed were not loud enough for Ouden to hear, nor did he expect he would be able to do so, but he studied the countenances of the speakers in the hope of reading their meaning. While he could not feel absolutely sure in his conclusions, yet he believed there was no additional cause for alarm, and, turning about, lost no time in stealing back to his little boat, which had already brought him so many miles up the Catsuga.

But a ripple in the events that had gone smoothly enough thus far was closer at hand than Orris Ouden anticipated. He stole with unerring precision to the point where he had left his canoe, and the first genuine surprise

of the evening came when he awoke to the fact that it was gone.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he muttered as he straightened up; "that's something I warn't countin' on."

The natural supposition was that, inasmuch as the craft was missing, some one must have removed it.

"The varmint that passed so near me must have seen it after all," concluded Orris. "He has moved it to some spot where he cal'lates to put his hand on it when he wants it, but afore he does that he's got to fix things with a chap about my size."

It would seem that if the stranger had discovered the canoe nestling under the bank he would have pursued a different course than that which he really followed. Why did he not paddle down stream with his prize, or, if he expected the speedy return of the owner, why did he not lie in wait for him?

Without perplexing himself with attempting to answer these questions, Orris Ouden set to work to recover his property. It was reasonable to conclude that the boat was at

some point not far off, either up or down the Catsuga. He therefore moved up the river for several rods, examining the shore with the thoroughness he always showed.

The result was a failure, and he at once retraced his steps, keeping close to the shore, and making his movements as noiseless as possible. Less than a hundred feet below the point where he had left the canoe he made an important discovery. A gentle rustling against a bush first caught his attention, and, by bending low, he detected the boat drifting down stream. The gloom was so great that he was only able to effect this by bringing his face almost on a level with the water, and throwing the object partly against the illumination beyond.

This told the story. The canoe had not been touched by the enemy, but it was left lying so lightly against the bank that it swung loose of itself, and was floating toward the glow of the camp fires. Although the current was quite strong near the middle of the Catsuga, yet, naturally, it was sluggish near shore, and the boat was moving slowly. This

was well enough, but the alarming fact remained that it had already drifted so near the band of light that it was almost certain to be descried the next minute.

Had the question been that of losing his property, Orris Ouden would have been well content to let the canoe drift into the possession of his enemies, but more weighty questions were involved.

He had come to this section of the frontier on an errand of mercy. Not only did he seek to gain what information he could for General Greenfield, but, far more important than that, he had set out to rescue some of the members of an imperiled family whose cabin home was but a short distance away.

The discovery by the Iroquois of a canoe floating down stream was sure to tell them the truth, and to hasten their evil doings so much that all of the scout's skill and daring would be insufficient to the task of rescuing his friends.

It followed, therefore, that the boat must be recovered at all hazards, and with that promptness which I have referred to as a dis-

tinguishing trait of the scout he set about the task in the same moment that he made the discovery. He left his long rifle leaning against the nearest tree, for it was difficult to protect those old-fashioned weapons from temporary disability by wetting, and he believed he ran no risk of losing the valuable gun. Then, stepping in the water, he began wading out to the canoe, which was less than twenty feet from shore. All the coolness and skill of the scout were required from the start. The first two steps brought the water barely above his knees; the next took him abruptly over his head. You know how difficult it is at such times to avoid betraying one's self by splashing, and it cannot be said that Ouden fully succeeded in averting the danger of the misstep. But he suffered himself to go unresistingly under the surface with the least possible noise, and took advantage of the submergence to swim the intervening space. Thus, when his head gently came to air again, he was able to catch hold of the gunwale with one hand.

It was at this critical moment that the

canoe actually entered the area of illumination thrown out by the fires, and had it so happened that any one of the warriors was gazing at the spot he could not have failed to see the craft.

By a singular coincidence, if such it may be termed, Iron Heart, the Seneca chieftain, was looking up the river just then, though his gaze was the aimless one of a person sunk in reverie, rather than the keen scrutiny displayed when his senses are on the alert.

But even that was sufficient to tell him that something unusual was going on near the line of shadow. He quickly straightened up and fixed his eyes on the spot, determined to know what it meant.

You need not be told that Orris Ouden did not allow a second to run to waste. The instant his left hand rested on the edge of the canoe, he began swimming powerfully and silently up stream, with the aid of his other arm and feet.

This was more of a task than would be supposed, for the current was perceptibly stronger than near shore, and you can ap-

preciate the degree to which the scout was handicapped. Nevertheless, he put forth his best efforts, and slowly ascended the current toward the all-enveloping gloom that he hoped would shut him out from the sight of the baleful eyes on shore.

No enterprise so seemingly slight of itself could have better displayed the admirable woodcraft of the frontiersman. He was between the canoe and the shore on which Iron Heart stood, with his warriors around him. It was all-important that the hunter should know whether he had awakened the suspicion of the party on either side of the river.

Thus it was that while swimming against the current he quietly raised his head and shoulders so far above the surface that he was able to look over the boat at the Indians on the further bank. It was but a single glance he took, but it was enough to tell him the pleasing truth that no one there had noticed what was going on so close at hand.

The look at the nearer shore was less satisfactory. He noticed that Iron Heart, instead of leaning against the oak, had straightened

up, and was gazing so fixedly at the point where the canoe had just entered the shadow that there could be no doubt his suspicion was awakened. More than that, Ouden saw him move hurriedly up stream; unquestionably he had set out to satisfy himself what the strange sight meant.

The scout now adopted a bold plan. To approach the shore he had just left was to insure discovery. He therefore headed directly across the river, never pausing until the nose of the canoe ran under the bushes on the opposite shore. Feeling that it was secure for the time in the place, he turned about and swam back, landing at the very spot where he had left his gun. Fortunately it had not been disturbed, and, fastening it to his back, he once more entered the Catsuga and returned to his craft.

CHAPTER III.

THREE VOYAGERS.

IT so happened that on that same cool autumn night, a long time ago, another canoe was on the Catsuga only a comparatively short distance from the one in which Orris Ouden was paddling up the river.

The second canoe, however, was descending the stream, and contained three individuals instead of a single person. These were boys and brothers.

Jack and Tom Morris were twins about seventeen years of age, and two sturdier, more active or brighter fellows you could not find in a long search. Their cheeks were rosy, their hazel eyes bright, and, as is always the case with persons abounding in health, they were generally overflowing with high spirits. Their parents were proud of the fine fellows, but really Mr. Varnum Morris was

unable at times to stand their frolics about the house, and he occasionally made them dance to the tune of a swinging hickory, which sent them yelling out-doors till the smarts subsided.

But Jack and Tom were affectionate fellows, and when their jollity ran away with them I do not know that they were so blamable; for, to tell the truth, they couldn't help it. It would have been a sad day in the Morris household had either of those ringing voices been hushed by death or disaster.

The third brother was more than a year older than Tom and Jack, but he was but an infant in body compared to them. Benny Morris had been a cripple from birth. His left leg was crooked at the knee, and dangled uselessly when he moved about on his crutch. Poor Benny could never hold his own in the way of strength or physical acquirements with the smallest boy. His face was pale, his large eyes usually bright, while his spirits if less boisterous than his brothers', seemed always cheerful.

If nature is sometimes cruel to her children

in one direction, she generally compensates for it in another. What Benny Morris lacked in bodily strength and activity he made up in mental endowment. His mind was a source of wondering admiration not only to his parents and brothers, but to all who knew the family. His mother gave him the rudiments of an education when he was very young, but after that the youngster continued it alone. The scanty store of books was added to, as occasion presented, by the proud father, and there seemed nothing beyond the comprehension of the crippled lad.

One of the most touching features of the life in the Morris household was the affection which the big sturdy twins, Jack and Tom, felt for their lame brother. It is not too much to say that either would have gladly given his life to save that of Benny, who fully returned their love.

Many and many a time, when the big fellows went on their hunting excursions, they insisted on Benny going with them, even though he was not only useless, but in the nature of an encumbrance. But his cheery

words, his bright face, and his woodcraft, which in some respects far surpassed that of his brothers, more than made up for his bodily weakness.

This little digression is needed, perhaps, to open the way to the events that follow. There is much more of an interesting nature that I could tell you about this remarkable boy, who was known and held in awe by many of the Indians, but this is hardly t' place.

The three lads were the only children of Mr. Varnum Morris and his wife Agnes, and they had all been born on the frontier, several miles beyond the fringe of settlements in which most of their friends lived. Jack had accompanied his parents down the Catsuga to where his mother intended to stay several weeks with her friends, while her husband pushed further east to the more settled portions, that he might procure some books and tools for Benny, they having been promised a long time before. Tom and the lame brother were left behind, where they enjoyed themselves to the fullest bent of their privileges. Benny was a genius in cookery. All

that Tom had to do was to furnish the elements, and under the deft manipulation of the youth, and with such crude facilities as were at command in a frontier home, he developed wonderful results.

So Jack bade his parents good-by, and was pursuing his way at a leisurely rate up the Catsuga, when whom should he meet but Orris Ouden, one of the most famous rangers of the border. The scout told him that trouble had broken out with the Iroquois, and that the most prudent thing for him to do was to bring his brothers down the river to the settlements without delay.

Jack was not much impressed by the words of the scout, partly because, as Ouden himself admitted, they were based on rumours that he had not yet verified; but these rumours were true, as was speedily proven.

On the morning of the day that Jack reached home his brother received a call from a friendly Mohawk, known as the Wild Cat, who urged them to leave the settlement at once, for the Six Nations had dug up the hatchet and taken the warpath. Further-

more, had not the parents of the boys left just when they did, the whole family would have been massacred. It had been decided by the Iroquois to keep the boys where they were until the return of their parents, and then put the whole family to torture. At the same time they would maintain a sharp watch to prevent anything in the shape of help reaching them.

The Wild Cat's advice was for the boys to start immediately across the country, keeping away from the river, which was certain to be closely patrolled; but Tom and Benny could not think of leaving until the return of Jack, even though the Wild Cat offered to act as their guide.

On the afternoon of the same day Orris Ouden and the friendly Mohawk met in the depths of the forest, and the white man learned the alarming truth from his dusky ally. Ouden determined to return at once to the Morris home and bring away the cripple and his brother. He did not know where Jack was, but concluded that the sturdy fellow was able to take care of himself.

Ouden acted promptly on this decision, and this explains how it was he came to be ascending the Catsuga on the autumn night that opens this story.

When Jack reached home and heard the news that his brother had to tell, he saw the gravity of the situation.

"It won't do to stay here," he said, in his decisive way "The Wild Cat wouldn't have taken the trouble to tell you all that if he hadn't known there was danger."

"But he told us to take to the woods," remarked Tom, "and to keep away from the river. What do you think of that?"

"I can't see that it makes much difference. There is but one trail leading to the settlements, and they will guard that as closely as the river. What's best, Benny?"

"There isn't much choice," replied the little fellow, who was sitting on a high stool in the cabin, in the room that was fully lit up by the glow of the fire on the hearth; "but if they are watching the trail we must keep out of the woods."

This was so apparent that the wonder was

that either of the others should have felt any hesitation. Burdened to some extent as they would have been by the presence of Benny, the chances would be much slighter than on the river, where they would also have the dense vegetation along the shore in which to conceal themselves. The twins were skilful canoeists, and were confident of making the voyage without detection from the Iroquois.

Tom suggested that they might take to the woods, avoiding the well-marked trail, but it would be a difficult task to make good progress without any landmark to guide them, especially when the darkness was so profound. In fact it would have been out of their power altogether, while the Catsuga offered a trail so broad that there could be no going astray from it.

Accordingly it was decided to use the canoe in which to descend the stream to the settlement, little more than a dozen miles distant. And that makes clear how it was that the frail craft with its three occupants was descending the Catsuga on the same autumn

night when Orris Ouden was paddling up the stream in his boat.

When the three brothers decided to start down the Catsuga in their canoe, they paused a few minutes to determine whether they should carry anything besides their arms and ammunition.

Jack and Tom, as a matter of course, were provided each with a fine flint-lock rifle, bullet-pouch, and all that was needed by a sportsman of those times, including a hunting-knife apiece; but neither carried anything in the shape of a pistol, for these weapons were clumsy affairs in the days of our forefathers.

Benny had never fired a gun in his life, and had no wish to do so. His puny strength was unequal to the handling of those heavy weapons that were often burdens to full grown men. It may be said that his strength lay in his weakness, since any foe with a vestige of manliness would scorn to inflict suffering on one who was manifestly unable to defend himself. The nearest approach that he had to a weapon was a handsome pocket-knife with several blades, all kept to the highest edge.

It was a present from his mother, and the lad displayed a wonderful ingenuity in fashioning curious playthings from pieces of wood. The interior of the cabin was ornamented with numerous specimens of his handiwork that would have done credit to the most skillful wood-carver in these modern times.

"We can't take anything besides ourselves," remarked Benny, after the evening meal had been hastily eaten and the three stood by the door, hesitating a moment before going forth.

"And this old place is pretty sure to have a visit from some of the redskins before long, and they won't leave anything that we can't take with us."

"But we can't carry all," added Benny, "so what's the use of trying to take anything?"

Jack saw the bright eyes of the little fellow fixed regretfully on the stand at the side of the room where his choicest treasures lay. They were several books, consisting of a history, an astronomy (very crude as compared with those of the present day), a story-book, and a fine

wooden-covered holy Bible, containing numerous excellent illustrations.

"I do hate to leave them," he said, with a tear in his eye, "though father has promised to bring me other books."

"I know which one you value most, and it shall go with us," said Tom, stepping quickly to the stand and picking up the Bible, which was quite a large book.

"That will be no bother," remarked Jack, "and I think it our duty to preserve it if we can."

"Let me carry it," said Benny, reaching out his hand.

"All we want you to do is to carry yourself," replied Jack, placing the precious volume under his arm and leading the way to the door.

Benny followed him, and in the gloom of the early evening the brothers stood on the outside of their home.

So the log cabin home was left just as it had been left hundreds of times before. The boys did not even pull in the latch string, for our fathers were hospitable people, and the stran-

ger making his way along the frontier rarely found the latch string drawn in when he was in need of food and shelter. Should any red marauders visit the place, they would find no trouble in entering that home.

CHAPTER IV.

A WARRIOR AND A TORCH.

IT was but a short distance to the margin of the winding river, where lay the graceful canoe that had served every member of the family many times. Benny was the first to enter, taking his seat in what might be considered the prow, though there was little difference between the ends of the craft. The brothers stepped in after him, each laid his rifle in the bottom, the Bible being placed near the feet of the lame one, and then, picking up a long, broad paddle apiece, the two swung them simultaneously, the boat shooting far out into the stream before the implements were dipped again.

"Is there any moon to-night?" asked Tom in a low voice, addressing the little fellow perched in front.

"It rises just before midnight; it is a half-moon, and the sky is clear."

"Then we are likely to have some light to guide us before we reach the settlement."

"No doubt of that," replied Benny; "we are about a dozen miles from the nearest settlement; we have the current with us, and we ought to reach it long before daylight, provided we are not hindered."

"There's the rub," observed Tom, who, now that they were fairly started on their journey, was impressed with the peril that impended over all; "it would seem that, if Jack saw nothing on his way here, we ought to have a good chance of getting through."

"I have often wondered," said Jack, looking affectionately at the little fellow whom he faced in the prow, "what the Iroquois would do with you, if you should ever become a prisoner."

"I can tell you," replied Benny, with a laugh that was as low and musical as that of a fairy princess.

"What's that?"

"Make me run the gantlet—what are you laughing at?" he demanded, with a pretence of indignation, partly raising his crutch threateningly.

"I can't help laughing," replied Jack, ceasing to swing his paddle for a moment that he might bend his head forward and yield to his mirth, "to think of the figure you would cut hobbling down between two lines of warriors on those sticks of yours. You would look fine, wouldn't you?"

"I can travel pretty fast when I try, and then, if I wanted to rest, why, I would stand on one foot and whack the warriors over the head with my crutch."

"No," said Jack, his face becoming serious, as he again dipped his paddle, "the Indians would never try anything like that with you. Do you know, Benny, I have sometimes believed that they wouldn't hurt you at all."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, the Indians—even the fiercest of them—are generally kind to the unfortunate. I have been told that they treat a crazy person as though he was in the keeping of the Great Spirit."

"They are kind to idiots, too," added Tom.

"Which makes it lucky for my big brothers," said Benny; "however, I am not

anxious to try the experiment. We have had Indian visitors at home ever since I can remember, and I have received lots of presents from them. But when they dig up the hatchet and go on the warpath they forget all about that."

"What of the Wild Cat?"

"The Wild Cat has listened to the preaching of the missionaries, and I have talked to him about the One who died for us all; it is that which stays his arm."

"But Iron Heart once paddled up the river," said Jack, "and, coming to our house, spread his blanket on the floor and stayed all night. He talks English well, and when I went to sleep I remember that the hum of your voice and his was in my ear."

"I remember it, too," added Tom; "mother says she believed you would have talked till daylight if she hadn't stopped you."

"I'll never forget that evening," said Benny, thoughtfully, "for it was one of the strangest of my life. Did I ever tell you what Iron Heart was so much interested in?"

"No."

"Religion; he asked me all sorts of questions about God and the Saviour, and what doctrines the missionaries preached. As he lay on his side on the blanket he rested his head on his hand, and, fixing his black eyes on me, put questions, sometimes in his own tongue, which beat anything I ever heard from a white person."

"What sort of an impression did you make on the old fellow?"

Benny shook his head.

"When we were through, and I was quite sure his heart had been touched, he told me, with a flash of his eyes, that his religion was never to forget an injury, and never to stay his hand as long as a white man trod the hunting grounds of his fathers. He wasn't afraid to say that, too, when he was in the cabin of one of the race he hated with a consuming hatred. I smiled, and told him that the Good Spirit would take all such bad thoughts out of his heart, and then, as mother interposed, I bade him good-night."

"And what do you think of Iron Heart now, Benny?"

"He is the young war chief of the Senecas, the fiercest of all the Six Nations. Nothing would delight him more than to surround our home with a party of warriors, apply the torch with his own hand, and tomahawk every one of us."

Jack and Tom shuddered at the picture, but they believed their wise brother spoke the truth, for he had drawn a true portrait, not of the poetical American Indian, but of the dusky miscreant as he exists to-day, and as he has existed always.

What though the daring Iroquois declared his religion taught him never to forget an injury, he failed to say that that faith taught him at the same time to forget kindness. When the red man raises aloft the glittering tomahawk, little it is to him whether the descending blade cleaves the skull of Caucasian seeking his life or the head of the gentle mother who has ever shown him the same love she shows her son.

Benny was about to speak when Jack and Tom stopped paddling, and the former raised his hand as a signal for silence. They had

just swept around a bend in the stream and were near the middle, when both lads caught the glimmer of the two camp fires that had been the cause of Orris Ouden's delay in ascending the Catsuga.

The cripple turned his head like a flash, and instantly emitted a soft whistle.

"They are waiting for us," he whispered. "We must be careful, or we shall never get by them."

The boys held their paddles still for a minute or two, during which the canoe drifted with the current.

"It won't do," added Benny, reading their thoughts; "the fires give enough light to reach clear across the river. You will have to land and carry the boat below."

"I don't want to do that unless it's the only way," said Jack. "Let's run in close to shore and take a look."

Benny offered no objection, and the canoe touched the shore at a point opposite to that whither the scout had swum when he recovered his rifle.

"Now, Tom," said the last speaker, "let's

find out what all this means; we don't know whether they are hostiles or not, but it won't take us long to find out. You don't mind being left alone for a short time, Benny?"

"Don't think of me; off with you, and get back as soon as you can."

The brothers vanished as quietly as a couple of veteran scouts reconnoitering a camp of enemies.

Benny settled down in the prow of the canoe to await their return, his confidence in their sagacity being such that he felt no misgiving for their safety. He was convinced now, as he had been from the first, that there was but the single way he had named of passing the Iroquois, who were undoubtedly on the watch to intercept any whites that might attempt to go up or down the river.

Fifteen minutes passed, and the youth was listening for the return of his brothers, when his sense of hearing, trained to a marvellous degree of keenness, apprised him that someone was approaching.

Although certain it was his friends who purposely announced their coming in this



"A guttural 'Huh!'" announced that he had discovered the canoe"



manner, the lad was too wise to speak or make the least noise that could tell them he knew of their presence.

All at once, to his dismay, a torch flamed out in the darkness as though it were an electric light suddenly sprung into existence. By its glow he saw the features of an Iroquois in his war paint stealing through the dense undergrowth straight toward the canoe.

Benny did not stir or speak, and hardly breathed. He was still hopeful that the warrior would pass by, but fate forbade.

The next minute the savage, creeping along in a crouching posture, with his rifle grasped in one hand and his torch held above his head in the other, halted within an arm's length of the craft and its startled occupant.

At the same moment a guttural "Huh!" announced that he had discovered the canoe and him who was seated in it.

CHAPTER V.

NIPPED IN THE BUD.

YOU may imagine the intensity with which little Benny Morris watched the approach of the Iroquois warrior with the flaring torch held above his head. He did not stir, nor did he seem to breathe, as he sat in the prow of the canoe under the overhanging bushes, with his dark eyes fixed on the swarthy red man, who looked tenfold more frightful because of the reflection of the smoking brand that guided him to the spot.

The Indian showed more astonishment than did the boy. The sight of a youth, sitting quietly in the boat with a crutch alongside him, and without any weapon with which to defend himself, was enough to startle the most stolid person.

After uttering his suppressed exclamation, he stood for a moment in a crouching posture

staring at the lad, as though uncertain whether his senses were not playing him false.

"Well, Iroquois," remarked Benny, speaking in Seneca, "what do you wish with me?"

Nothing could have added to the amazement of the warrior except to hear himself addressed in his own tongue. He had never seen the lad before, and was unprepared for the shock. There was something in the appearance of the boy and his mastery of the Indian language that could not fail to impress the savage. It was so out of keeping with that to which he was accustomed that for the moment he was speechless.

Having asked his question, Benny continued looking fixedly in the painted countenance, as if waiting for a reply.

But if the Iroquois was surprised he was quick to recover his self-possession. Straightening up, and lowering the torch so that it was below his knee, his countenance being thus partly thrown in shadow, he said:

"Who is my brother?"

"The friend of the red man," was the response.

"Why is he here alone?"

"He waits the coming of his brothers, with their guns; they will soon be back, for they have gone but a short way."

This ought to have been a disturbing answer, but the warrior acted as though he doubted its truth.

"How does my brother speak in the tongue of the red man?"

"He learned to do so from Iron Heart and his warriors."

"The whelp of the palefaces lies!"

This exclamation was made with a venom that left no doubt of the fury of the Indian. Benny had told the simple truth, but in doing so he went beyond the credulity of his hearer.

The theory that the great war chief of the Six Nations, who hated the white man with an inextinguishable hatred, had taught his tongue to this insignificant member of the race was so incredible that not for an instant did the listener credit it. As he uttered his fierce words he deliberately stepped forward into the canoe, took up one of the paddles, and shoved the craft clear of the land. Instead

of flinging the torch overboard, he set one end in the bottom of the boat, leaving the flame burning so far above the gunwale that it did not endanger it, while it afforded an excellent light for his operations.

If any proof of the Iroquois' disbelief of Benny's story was needed, it was thus given. I refer not to what he had said about Iron Heart teaching him the Indian tongue, but to the assertion that his brothers were near at hand.

If the youth was right, then the warrior was taking frightful risks in thus exposing himself as a target to any friends of his prisoner who were in the vicinity. What better mark could Jack or Tom want than was thus offered?

The captor must have believed the lame lad had paddled thither without company, and, discovering the camp fires below him, had run into shore to decide on the safest course to follow.

Benny's situation was most peculiar. He had no wish to be carried into the Iroquois camp, for despite a certain faith that more
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leniency would be shown him than to either of his brothers, or indeed to anyone, he feared the results in the present inflamed disposition of the red men. He recalled the furious words of Iron Heart when stretched on a blanket in Benny's home, and it augured ill for any white person who should fall into his hands.

And where were Jack and Tom? It appeared to the cripple they were long overdue, and must be somewhere near. If so, they could not fail to see the torch, which revealed both occupants of the canoe, and which would tell them the truth at a glance.

The lad looked to the right and left, but the shores were shrouded in shadow, made the more dense by the glare of the smoking torch which partly obscured his vision.

Turning his head, he could plainly see the light of the two camp fires burning opposite to each other, with the dark figures moving along the banks. A short distance further and the canoe would enter the area of illumination, and be in full sight of every member of the war parties.

The red man had taken his place in the

stern of the canoe, where one sweep of the paddle sent it several yards into the stream; but after that he remained stationary. His rifle lay in the bottom of the boat, the polished barrel reflecting the light of the torch near it, while he sat like a statue, holding the blade of the paddle in the current, but stirring it not.

He seemed to be gazing straight ahead, and was awaiting the moment when another sweep of the implement would send the craft skimming to the right or left bank, as he might choose for his landing place.

"You don't know the risk you are running," thought Benny, looking at the ferocious countenance as revealed in the dim light. "I have told you enough, and, if you choose not to heed my warning, I cannot be blamed for what follows."

"Why did the paleface come alone in the canoe?" asked the warrior, in a low guttural voice.

"Iroquois, I have answered you once, and I do not speak with a double-tongue. I came not alone; my brothers were with me; they

went ashore that they might look at the camp of the red man."

"The paleface lies!" was the fierce comment of the savage.

"If the Iroquois believes me not, let him ask no questions," responded the lad.

This was not only dignified, but it was brave to the point of recklessness. The Indian had proven his fiery temper, and acted as though seeking some pretext for wreaking his fury upon one unable to help himself.

The warrior was quiet a second or two, as if nursing his wrath, and then added :

"All the palefaces speak lies."

"I have no doubt many of them do, and your own people, Iroquois, can give a few lessons in the same business."

This remark, whose translation of course is quite free, was hardly understood in all its fullness by the Indian, though his answer showed that he caught something of its meaning.

"The red men have but a single tongue; it is the palefaces who steal their hunting grounds, and when they ask for pay, fire their

guns at them; but it will not be so any longer."

"What means my brother?"

"The Six Nations have dug up the hatchet; they have put the war paint on their faces; they have taken the trail again. Iron Heart is their leader; they will drive the white men into the deep water, and these hunting grounds shall belong to the red men again, as the Great Spirit means them to belong."

"Iron Heart is not the first chieftain who has tried to take the forests and streams and mountains from the palefaces, but he is a couple of hundred years too late. Had the red men joined together like true brothers when the white people first came across the water they could have kept them away; but one Indian hates all other Indians, and will bury his tomahawk in his skull as quickly as he will in the head of the babe and its mother."

"The whelp of a paleface tells lies, like those he has already told. Are not the Senecas, Oneidas, Mohawks, and all who make up the Six Nations, friends? Do not they unite to fight the palefaces?"

"But what of the Delawares, the Wampagoags, the Narragansetts, and the tribes that live toward the setting sun?"

"They are the enemies of the Iroquois; they are not true Indians."

"That's their opinion of the Iroquois, and it's my belief that both of you are quite right."

"The whelp shall not see his brothers that he lies about! He shall not look upon his father and mother! He shall die as all his people shall die—by the hatchet and rifle of the red men!"

The Indian, with a quick, silent movement, laid down the paddle in the boat at his feet and took up his gun.

Benny Morris read his purpose as plainly as if the savage had announced it in his own words. He could not help himself, but he did not shrink or show any evidence of fear in his countenance.

"The whelp of the palefaces shall die, for he is not fit to live!" added the savage, in a voice all the more terrible in its intense hatred, because the words were uttered

scarcely above a whisper. "He shall die as the dog dies——"

The click of the upraised hammer followed, and the rifle was half raised, when the Iroquois uttered a rasping screech, sprang half to his feet, and went overboard with a splash, as dead as dead could be.

CHAPTER VI.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

THERE was good reason for the continued absence of Jack and Tom Morris.

Upon leaving their lame brother in the canoe at the river side they expected to return in a brief while, for, as will be seen, the apparent task before them was quite simple. They had only to make sure of the Indians encamped near. If they were in their war paint it was proof of their hostility, and it would be unsafe for the boys to let their presence become known ; and, since one good look at the warriors would bring the information wished, it would seem that a few minutes were sufficient.

And such would have been the case but for a most unexpected turn to their reconnaissance.

In moving away from the canoe, Tom placed himself in front, his brother following

close on his heels. They had gone but a short distance when they saw a glimmer of light among the trees, and their movements were pushed with the utmost silence and care.

They were yet too far off to gain as distinct a view as they wished, when Tom stopped, and, turning his head, waited for Jack to place himself beside him.

"This is getting rather ticklish," said the former; "there isn't one chance in a hundred that they are friendly."

"Shall we turn back?"

"No; let's make dead sure of it, but there isn't any use of both of us going quite near."

"Get out," replied Jack, in his good-natured way; "I've as much right as you to run my head in the lion's mouth, but I don't calculate that either one of us is going to do that, because there isn't any need of it."

"All right," said his brother. "Come on."

They were not fully pleased to observe that the woods grew more open as they approached the camp fire, which you will bear in mind was not on the side of the river on which Iron Heart was standing with his warriors. This

rendered great care necessary, but, as I have shown, the duty required of the brothers was not perilous enough to justify any great risks on their part.

"I guess this will do," said Tom, in the same guarded voice; "we have a pretty good view here."

"Yes; it's all we want."

At that moment they were standing perhaps thirty yards from the fire, around which were grouped about the same number of Iroquois that I have described as being on the other shore. There was much similarity in their postures, and in their movements, too. It being comparatively early in the evening, several were engaged in preparing supper, while others were lolling about in all sorts of lazy attitudes.

The first distant glance the boys gained of the red men told the startling truth: all were on the warpath, and the warning of Orris Ouden and the Wild Cat was fully justified. The boys had not taken their departure an hour too soon.

There was something fascinating in the

scene in the dismal forest on that cool autumn night, and Tom Morris had stood but a moment when he quietly shifted his position to another tree somewhat to the right and a dozen feet in advance.

Jack saw no call for such a change, and he stayed where he was, assured that his view was as good as that of his brother.

The situation of the lads may be described as just beyond the margin of light thrown out by the large fire. They were thus in the darkness of the wood, where they were secured from discovery so long as they used only ordinary prudence.

Jack had held his post five minutes when he began to wonder why Tom delayed his return. He must have forgotten their lame brother waiting under the shadow of the bank and anxious for them to rejoin him.

It was too dangerous to signal to his companion when both were so near their enemies, though Jack was impatient enough to do so, especially when he saw the light from the fire actually reached the tree behind which Tom was standing.

"What can be the matter with him?" the wondering Jack asked himself. "He must know he is running into danger, and that, too, when there isn't any call to do so."

The lad's heart gave a painful throb, for at that moment he discerned the shadowy figure of an Indian between him and his brother.

Where the savage had come from was a mystery, though, from the fact that he had been invisible until that moment, it was clear he must have been among the trees beyond the range of the camp fire, and was on his return when, as ill-fortune would have it, he discovered one of the boys.

Jack was so far in the gloom that he was confident he was not observed by any of their enemies, though he cast a furtive glance over his shoulder as though half expecting to see a savage Iroquois.

Even with the help of the firelight the obscurity was such that Jack could not discern distinctly what was going on.

"I don't know whether Tom suspects his danger or not," was the thought of Jack; "but if that redskin fancies he is going to cut

him down without warning he'll find that Mr. Jack Morris has got something to say about it."

Tom's curiosity to gain a nearer view of the war party was not unnatural, for he fancied that among the Iroquois was one that had visited his home several times. He was a worthless vagabond known among the whites as Pete. His love for whisky made him a nuisance, and more than one settler had thrust him out of his cabin as an intolerable affliction, though he had never received anything but kindness at the home of Varnum Morris.

The fellow was on the further side of the camp, where other warriors interposed to an extent that prevented a satisfactory view, and it was with a purpose of assuring himself on that point that Tom ventured closer than he meant to do at first.

Only a few minutes were necessary to gain the knowledge he was seeking; the warrior that had arrested his interest was old Pete, the vagrant that had sat at their table and slept on a blanket in the corner of their home many a time.

"And he was among the first to dig up the hatchet," was the truthful conclusion of Tom Morris. "If father had kicked him from the house, as other people did, he would have been more backward about wishing to drive the white men from the hunting grounds of his fathers."

"I can't be too thankful for one thing," added Tom, feeling the pleasant thrill that had stirred his heart more than once that evening, "and that is, that father and mother are beyond their reach. They are safe, no matter what happens to us."

A sound like the breaking of a twig caused him to turn his head. Enough light penetrated the gloom for him to see a warrior within six feet of him, with his tightly clenched knife raised so that it would be buried in the lad's body on the next step forward.

The young gentleman was not the one to stand still and yield to despair. The youths of the frontier were not trained in that fashion. He instantly recoiled, his rifle grasped in both hands, and at the same time drew back the hammer of his gun.

It was not necessary to bring it to a level to aim, for the space between him and the Indian was too slight to require that. He held the weapon in such a way that he had but to press the trigger to send the bullet through the breast of the savage.

But what a turmoil that would create among the Iroquois in camp! They would instantly flock to the spot, and escape for the three boys would be out of the question.

At such a crisis, however, the imperiled person has no time to think of after-complications. But, fortunately, the use of the gun was not necessary, for it was at this juncture that Jack Morris took a hand in the proceedings.

He had seen enough to convince him of the imminent danger of his brother, and stepping from behind the tree trunk that was serving him as a screen, he brought his heavy rifle to his shoulder. At the instant of doing so he gave utterance to a "Huh" meant to attract the attention of the warrior.

It did not fail to do so, and the Iroquois, while in the act of gathering his muscles for

the spring that was sure to be fatal to himself or the lad, flirled his head part way round, and saw in the gloom a sturdy youth with his deadly weapon levelled at him. It is not often that the American Indian is caught in such a situation that he is not only utterly unable to help himself, but sees that such is the fact. This case, however, was one of those few, and there was a second or two during which it was only truth to say he was paralyzed. But he was a sagacious fellow, and he saw that both the youths had no wish to alarm the warriors in camp by firing their guns, for were it otherwise they would not have hesitated a moment.

This knowledge, or rather suspicion, on the part of the red man opened the way for possible escape. Without emitting any sound, and with his body bent forward as if about to leap, he began slowly retreating, with his face towards the lads who held him at their mercy. His movement suggested that he was merely recoiling to gather himself for a more terrific spring, like the runner who is in doubt whether he can leap the chasm that unexpectedly yawns in front of him.

But Tom and Jack read the meaning aright, and they were glad enough to remain neutral, as may be said, while the red man took himself from their presence. The gloom added to his fierceness, and even though, after he had retreated a step or two, they could discern nothing but his crouching posture, imagination intensified the frightful ferocity of his countenance.

Dimmer and fainter became the figure until it melted in the shadows beyond, and the brothers awoke to the fact that while they were still staring into the gloom they saw nothing.

The Iroquois had vanished, doubtless relieved beyond expression at his deliverance from what looked for the moment like certain death.

Jack and Tom appreciated the value of the seconds, and threw none away by staying where they were.

"He's gone," whispered Tom, "and we can't leave too soon."

"I think we have learned enough."

Jack was now in advance, and he walked

much faster from the spot than he had done to it. They had learned that the Catsuga was so closely guarded by savage Iroquois that it was impossible to pass between the camp fires. But the one course remained; that was to abandon their canoe, or to do as Orris Ouden had done in ascending the river.

The distance was slight to the edge of the water, and, though the gloom was impenetrable, the youths made their way with considerable certainty until within a few steps.

"What the mischief does that mean?" demanded Jack, abruptly halting and speaking incautiously loud.

Tom had also caught the glimmer of a light moving among the trees in front, and he quickly placed himself beside his brother.

"It is a torch, as sure as you live, and someone is carrying it."

"No, it moves too smoothly for that; it is floating over the water. Someone is swimming with it, or—come on!"

A few seconds brought them to the river side, where they saw a most alarming sight, as you can well understand.

The canoe which they had left but a short time before was floating down stream. Near the middle rested a torch, with the smoking flame above the gunwale. In the front sat Benny, and the reflection of the light on his white face showed no more perturbation than when his brothers swung the paddles. At the stern was the Iroquois Indian, holding the motionless paddle, with one end resting in the water, while his baleful gaze was fixed on the little fellow in front.

"Great heavens!" whispered Tom, "he has made a prisoner of Benny!"

"But he hasn't got away with him yet," added Jack, significantly. "I reckon we'll have something to do with that."

"Hark! They are talking."

In the profound stillness the low murmurs of the voices of the captor and captive reached the boys, who felt no more hesitation in shooting the savage that had dared to molest their lame brother than they would feel in crushing the coiled rattlesnake in their path.

"There's only one thing to do," added Jack the next minute. "We've got to plug him."

"There's no need of both firing. I'll pick him off, and it will be such a clean job that a second shot won't be needed."

"All right; I'll be ready to follow if you should happen to make a miss of it."

But the distance was so short that Tom would not admit the possibility of failure.

Realizing the importance of what he was about to do, and compelled to aim in the dark, Tom showed commendable deliberation. At such times it may be said the skilled marksman feels how to make his aim accurate; but as the youth brought his gun to a level a ray from the moving torch shone against the barrel, and he knew his aim was certain.

But in the act of pulling the trigger the Iroquois uttered his death shriek, and, springing partly to his feet, plunged overboard.

Tom Morris restrained his fire, for it was not needed, since the Indian was slain by the rifle of some one else.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE BANK.

IT may be that Benny Morris was expecting some intervention like that which took place. In fact, he wondered why it was delayed. Well aware that no risk was too great for his brothers to incur for his sake, he knew they would not remain idle so long as he was in peril.

He caught the flash of the rifle from the gloom along shore, and, despite the shocking fate of the Iroquois, he was quick-witted enough to take instant advantage of it. Hardly had the splashing water been flung over his face when he crept forward, and, seizing the torch, flung it into the water, where it was instantly extinguished, the momentary flickering of light showing the black hair of the red man as he sank from sight forever. Then, lifting the nearest paddle, he

dipped the blade into the water and headed the craft toward the point whence he had caught the flash of the gun that saved him.

The crippled lad was not without considerable strength in his arms, and, as you are aware, it is skill, more than power, that is necessary for the successful management of those small craft used by settlers and Indians.

He observed that the gun was fired from a point some rods up the stream, instead of opposite the boat, that had drifted alarmingly near the illumination of the camp fires.

The canoe spun round like a top, and was skimming over the surface when the lad's calculations were knocked askew by a low whistle coming from a spot abreast of him. He instantly ceased swinging the paddle, uncertain what he ought to do, for the signal was the very one the brothers used in communicating with each other when it was imprudent to use their voices.

"How can that be?" he asked himself. "Jack and Tom could not have changed their situation as quickly as that. It must be an Indian who knows our signal."

Once more the faint call sounded, and in his anxiety Benny called in a low voice:

"Is that you, Jack or Tom?"

"Yes; hurry in here."

Hesitating no longer, the lad gave the craft an impetus that drove the prow underneath the shrubbery along shore, where he was instantly joined by his brothers.

"My gracious!" said the delighted Benny, "that shot of yours was just in the nick of time; but how did you manage to get down here so soon?"

"Neither of us fired the gun that killed the Iroquois," replied Tom.

"Who did it, then?"

"That's what we would like to know; I had my rifle levelled, and would have pulled the trigger the same if some one hadn't taken the job on my hands."

"It must have been the Wild Cat," said Jack, "for I can't think of anyone else."

"It wasn't him," Benny was quick to say, "for he would not dare do such a thing; he is friendly with his people and he likes us, but he won't run any risk like that for our sakes."

"Sh!" admonished Jack, "some one is coming."

All became silent. The larger brothers were still standing on the bank close to the boat in which the cripple sat with paddle in hand. The sound was peculiar. It was not like a person moving over the leaves and through the undergrowth, but as if something was pushing past the vegetation.

"It's a canoe like our own," whispered Benny; "have your gun ready."

"Halloo, thar!"

The hail was scarcely louder than the softly-spoken words of Benny, but every one of the listeners recognized it as the voice of Orris Ouden, the scout, whom they supposed to be a long way from them at that hour.

"Is that you, Orris?" asked Benny, catching the soft ripple of the paddle.

"I reckon it is," was the hearty response. "It's too dark to see you thar, but you can't be fur off; whar's Jack and Tom?"

"We are all here," was the reply, whereupon Ouden forced his boat alongside the other and greeted his three friends, whom he

was on his way to help rescue from their peril when he encountered them on the river in this singular manner.

A minute or two was enough to exchange experiences and learn how the present situation had come about.

Meanwhile, as may be supposed, the crack of the rifle and the wild cry of the Indian had created something akin to consternation among the Iroquois on both sides of the river. It was startling proof that the very parties for whom they were waiting had appeared among them in the most unexpected manner, and for the present had turned the tables alarmingly. Their best scouts, including Iron Heart himself, instantly scattered to learn the meaning of the startling occurrence, and they were sure to scour the woods on both sides of the Catsuga, and in every direction.

"Let them hunt all they want to," said Ouden, with a chuckle. "So long as this darkness lasts they won't find us, unless one of you lights a torch to show 'em the way."

"But if we stay here all night they'll grab us in the morning," remarked Jack

Morris, unable to share the hopefulness of the hunter.

"But we ain't goin' to stay here until morning."

At the suggestion of Ouden the two boys took their seats in their canoe, he doing the same, and installing himself master of ceremonies.

His own boat was not buoyant enough to carry more than two persons, while the other readily supported double that number.

"What's the use of doing this?" was the query of Benny. "It won't do to run by the fires."

"No," replied the scout; "when I paddled up the river I run into shore below and carried my canoe round the varmints, landing just above 'em on the other side. I crossed over here, and was just starting up stream for your place, when I found thar was another boat on the river. I was tryin' to find out what it meant, and larned in time to give my compliments to that redskin that won't try to head a torchlight procession down the Cat-suga ag'in."

"Then we shall have to take the boat around the camp to a point lower down."

"That's what will have to be done, if we make a journey to the settlement by water."

"Why, then, do you wait?"

"The varmints are too thick in the woods for the trip jist yet. Besides, the night is young, and there ain't such a hurry as all that."

The boys now understood the reason of the scout's delay. He allowed them to talk freely, and indeed did his part in that line, but their words were uttered so softly that they could not have been overheard a dozen yards off, while he relied on his acute sense of hearing to discover the approach of danger in time to avoid it.

"It seems to me," said Benny, "that if we should push up stream far enough to get out of reach of these warriors, and then start across the country on foot, it will better than to wait here and run the risk of capture."

"I've been thinkin' of that same thing," said Ouden, "and I don't know but what we'll do it, after all. It will be a good deal easier

to foller the river than to tramp the woods till morning—that is, I mean easier for you, my little man.”

“Don’t change any plan on my account,” the lame lad hastened to say, “for I can walk a long way, and if I get tired Tom and Jack will take turns in carrying me.”

“It ain’t on account of the burden you would be,” added the scout, “for I wouldn’t make any more of taking you on my shoulders and trotting off with you than I would in frolicking with a baby two years old; but if we should happen to run into a hornet’s nest, you can see how hard it would be to get along with you. Howsomever, as I said, we may try that if it turns out to be the best thing to do.”

“It strikes me,” said Tom, “that they must have known that the shriek of the Indian you shot came from the river, and they will be likely to search there before anywhere else.”

“They don’t know that, though they may suspect it.”

“Haven’t they got any canoe of their own?”

"I don't know of a single one ; I searched all I could, which wasn't much, and didn't get a look at a boat anywhere along the shore. The varmints hain't any reason to hide 'em, and, if they did bring 'em along, they ought to be in sight under the banks."

"Where did the Iroquois come from in reaching this spot?"

"Straight from their villages, a good many miles back. If they had paddled down the Catsuga they must have passed your house, and you would have seen 'em."

This was logical, and the boys accepted the theory. It could not fail to add to their sense of security, since, with Ouder controlling the canoe, and with the dense gloom favouring them, it must prove an exceedingly hard task for any company of Indians, no matter how numerous or skilful, to get the upper hand of the little company on the river.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEADING UP STREAM.

OUR friends were silent a little while, during which they heard the numerous signals of the Iroquois, who seemed to be on every side prosecuting their search for those who dared to approach such a formidable war party and shoot one of their men.

"I'm goin' to try a trick on 'em," remarked the scout somewhat later.

"What's that?" asked Benny.

"Wait and you will see."

"I can't see much chance for any trick," replied Jack Morris, unable to understand how the frontiersman could feel in such merry spirits when they were literally surrounded by peril.

"Wal," replied Ouden in his droll way, "bein' it's so dark I don't expect you to see much of anything, and I observe that you

don't seem to feel like splittin' your sides laughing; but if I ain't powerfully mistook you'll do more grinnin' in the course of an hour than you have for a week—sh!"

The hunter suddenly awoke to the fact that he was more careless than he was prudent, for at that moment the sounds near at hand showed that two of the keen-scented Iroquois were not only approaching the spot where the canoe lay against the bank, but that they had learned it was there.

There were two canoes lying under the bank, the hunter and two boys being seated in the larger one. Probably it was the incautiously loud words uttered by Ouden himself that directed the two Iroquois groping near the spot to the precise place where the little party was awaiting a favorable chance to steal out and resume their journey to the settlements down the Catsuga.

The footfall of the red men had hardly been observed when a faint sound like the hissing of a serpent fell upon the ears of the listeners, who knew what it meant. It was the announcement of one of the red men to his com-

panion that he had made an important discovery.

Instantly the hunter dipped his paddle deep and drove the canoe from under the bank of the stream, where it was invisible to anyone along shore. In doing so the rush of the blade through the water produced a rippling which, in the stillness, could have been heard several rods away. It seemed to the boys that the hunter was strangely careless, but in truth he purposely caused the noise.

As he forced the boat containing himself and occupants into the current he gave the other a shove which set that also adrift. Not only that, but it was impelled further out in the stream than his own, and went floating down the Catsuga, so that, if unchecked, it was sure to pass between the fires in plain sight of the warriors on the shore.

That the Iroquois who had threaded their way to the spot knew that they had found the hiding-place of the whites was proven by the vigorous signals they sent forth, some of them consisting of whoops which they must

have known would be understood by their enemies as well as friends.

Not only that, but both discharged their rifles by guess, the balls whistling much closer to the fugitives than was pleasant.

None of the boys ventured to whisper to each other. Everything was left to their companion, who was a famous expert at the business in which he was now engaged. The four occupants were closely crowded, but there was room for him to swing his long muscular arms that swayed the paddle.

"I could drop one of them varmints," he thought, with a glance toward the spot whence came the flashes; "but it ain't worth while, bein' as it would show them whar to send the next shots after us."

Suddenly the listening ears caught another peculiar sound. No one suspected its meaning but Ouden, and he ventured to whisper:

"The fools are going to try to swim to us."

As he spoke he worked the canoe further out in the stream, and several rods above the point where he had been holding it motionless. The situation gave a view of the empty

canoe drifting between the camp fires. He was interested in the result, and made known to his companions that the trick he intended trying on the red men was the very thing that was now brought about by their own action; he meant to set the canoe afloat, with the view of making the Iroquois believe its occupants were to steal by them.

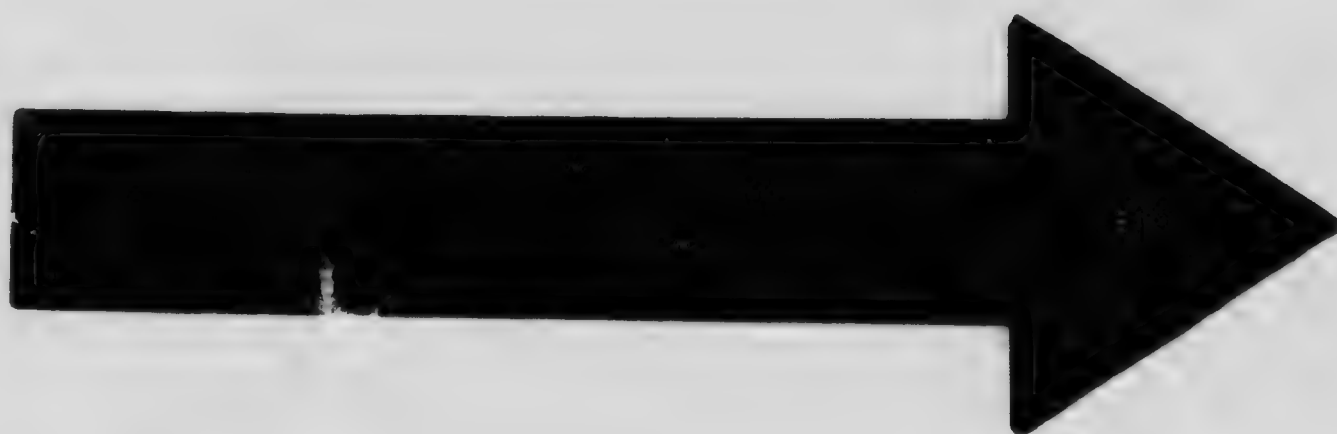
If one or two Indians entered the water to push their search they had an almost hopeless task, since they were at great disadvantage, and could only expect to open the way, as may be said, for the other warriors. What they meant to accomplish, however, was checked for the time by what took place further down the stream.

It will be remembered that all through this trying ordeal our friends were but a brief distance above the camp fires, and hardly a full minute had gone by after the Iroquois undertook to swim out into the river when Orris Ouden's boat, drifting aimlessly with the current, entered the area of light and was observed by the Iroquois on the banks, their numbers being probably one-half of the entire force.

The excitement for the moment was unbounded. The whooping and signalling must have hurried nearly all the Indians that were groping through the woods to the spot, under the belief that the whites had been entrapped. It is not improbable that the Iroquois believed that the random shots fired from the bank a few minutes before had killed the man or men within the boat, for as yet they were without the means of knowing how many of their enemies were in the neighborhood.

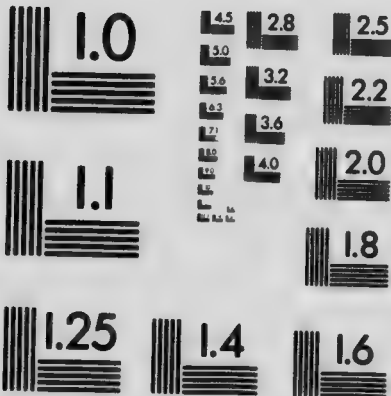
The conclusion, however, was reasonable that there was but a single person, who had been harmed to such an extent that he was unable to manage the craft. It was not unlikely, therefore, that he had fallen forward on his face in the canoe, and was lying in the bottom, where he could not be seen from the shore.

Whatever the conclusion of the Indians, they at once opened a scattering fire on the boat, which was struck again and again from both sides of the stream. There was something in its action very like that of a living creature, for it turned first one way and then



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another, according as the volleys from either side exceeded the other, as if it were blindly trying to extricate itself from the deadly sleet rattling around it.

All the time it was floating steadily downward, and, unless checked, must re-enter the gloom below and become invisible to the redskins who were paying such attention to it.

Those sagacious warriors must have recalled that it was possible for a skilled backwoodsman so to surround himself, while crouching in the bottom of the boat, that he would be beyond the reach of all the bullets that could be driven through the delicate sides.

To prevent any escape by that means, several of them leaped into the river and began swimming hastily out to the craft.

Orris Ouden smiled grimly, for that was the very result for which he hoped.

The distance was comparatively short, and before the canoe could drift into the gloom below a couple of the Iroquois were at its side; but, brave as they unquestionably were, they hesitated about raising their heads far enough to take a peep into the interior. If a wounded

white man was there, he would be quite sure to give sharp attention to any such intruder.

One of the warriors, however, was seen to seize the stern of the craft with both hands and slowly raise himself. He was in such plain sight at the time that all four of our friends noticed the front of the boat rise and the stern sink as he drew down upon it.

One glance, and the head of the Indian was lowered so quickly that the whites, had they not known the truth, would have believed the motion was to dodge a blow.

But the next instant the head and shoulders were lifted again and the Indian learned the truth; the canoe was empty of all except the water that had oozed through the many bullet holes.

It followed, therefore, that the owner or owners had either been killed or had abandoned the craft. At any rate, they were beyond reach of the vengeful redskins.

During this peculiar exhibition our friends gave their full attention to it, and, it may be said, enjoyed every phase. At any rate all gained a vivid idea of what was sure to befall

them in case they undertook to run the gantlet of the war parties.

"I reckon we've seen enough," remarked Oudin, who now began using his paddle so quietly that none would have suspected it but for the impetus of the boat under them.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Benny.

"Paddle up stream till we're safe above 'em, and then land and foot it to the settlements."

"It's the only thing to be done," said Jack, "unless we carry the canoe to some point below, just as you carried yours around the Iroquois in coming up stream."

"I'm afeared the thing is too heavy to manage among the trees, though I ain't sure I won't try it," returned the hunter.

"I'm in favour of using the boat," said Tom decisively.

"Why?" asked Ouden.

"Well, in the first place, though it isn't more than a dozen miles through the woods, and we ought to reach the settlements before daylight, we may find the Iroquois ahead of us."

"What do you mean?" asked Benny.

"This: yesterday—and, indeed, this morning—there wasn't one of the Indians in this neighbourhood; now they are everywhere. They have gone into the business of shooting white folks with a rush. They will know we have left the house, and that we are as likely to start through the woods as to stick to the river."

"What of that?"

"They will be on the watch to head us off. Instead of finding the way clear to the settlements, we are likely to run right into their arms, or, if we don't do that, we'll have to dodge around until after daylight, when they will strike our trail, and it will be all up with the whole party; for, as I take it, Ouden himself isn't smart enough to pull out of such a fix as that would be."

"There is sense in what the lad says," was the comment of the hunter, who, it must be borne in mind, was steadily working the canoe up stream and further from their enemies.

"Then, too," added Tom, "I don't see why there should be any trouble in managing the boat. Jack and I can carry it alone."

"It ain't that so much as it is twistin' about among the trees with the confounded thing. However, if it's the wish of all of you to stick to the river, I'm willin'; what do you say, my little man?" he asked of Benny.

"I'm in favour of sticking to the canoe."

"Then it shall be done," was the decisive response.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVERAL POINTS OF LIGHT.

ONE of the company was incautious enough to speak as loud as the hunter had done when resting under the shadow of the bank. They were further from their enemies than at that time, and it would seem the need of caution was not so great; but the Iroquois were active, and probably were dangerously near.

Ouden was gradually working the boat closer to the northern shore (that being the one on which he had met the boy), when Benny startled everyone by the whispered exclamation :

“I tell you the Indians are following us !”

“What do you mean ?” asked the hunter, holding his paddle still and leaning forward so as to bring his head as close as he could to the lad.

"They are in the water alongside, and—here they are!"

The boy was sitting with his left hand on the gunwale, his right grasping his crutch, when the cold, wet hand of an Iroquois swimmer was carefully raised with the intention of grasping the gunwale of the boat. It so chanced that, instead of doing so, he placed his palm and fingers directly over the small hand of Benny, who uttered the alarming exclamation.

The darkness was so profound that no one could see the intruder, though the agitation of the canoe showed that he had seized it, and there was some fear that he might overturn it. There was a general shrinking back to avoid his treacherous blow, while the larger lads and Ouden grasped their kriss and eagerly groped about to discover a way in which to drive them.

The impact of the damp hand gave the information to Benny that for the moment was denied to the others. Snatching back his hand, as if from the contact of a crawling snake, he quickly placed it alongside the

other, which was closed around his crutch. In the same breath this was lifted as high as he could reach, and brought down with a whack that could have been heard a hundred feet away. Though the lad could not see the savage, he knew just where he must be, and when the staff came down it landed squarely on his crown. The recipient must have seen more stars just then than ever adorned the firmament before.

Then, too, you must not forget that Benny had had a good deal of practice in banging his big brothers about with his crutch.

As the vigorous blow descended the lad commanded, in English, "Let go! We don't want you here!"

A grunt escaped the warrior, who loosened his hold and fell back into the water. As he did so, Benny let drive again, but missed his victim, bringing down the collar of his crutch with such force that the water was splashed over himself and the rest.

Ouden had thrust back his knife and seized his gun. Could he have but caught a glimpse of the redskin he would have given him the

contents of his weapon, but the splash was all that told him where he had sunk back in the current, and it was hardly worth his while to risk the shot.

All sat silent for a minute or two, their senses on the alert, but not the slightest sound indicated that other enemies were in the neighborhood, and the one that had received such a stunning welcome took himself off with a stealth that prevented the ear locating him.

"Wal, that was qu'ar," remarked Ouden, with a chuckle, when convinced that no immediate danger threatened.

"How do you suppose it came about that he found the canoe?" asked Jack Morris.

"He didn't find it; the canoe found him. He was one of the varmints that went further up the river than most of the rest, and then like enough started to swim to the other shore, and, as luck would have it, he run right into us."

"Why did he grab hold of the boat?" asked Jack Morris.

"He knowed we war inside, and he meant to draw himself up high enough with one

hand to give his right arm all the leverage he wanted, when he war goin' to make one blow that would have killed wharever it landed, and then he would have been off afore we could have wiped him out," said Ouden.

"And why didn't he do that?"

"Benny's blow came down too suddint."

"And I know he can hit a pretty good one," said Jack, "for I've felt it often enough."

"I'm with you there," added Tom, with a laugh.

"I'm afraid I broke my crutch," remarked Benny, feeling in the dark.

"More likely you broke the redskin's head," said Tom, "for I guess you struck pretty hard."

"Harder than ever before in my life—yes—the crutch is broken; what shall I do when we land?"

"We can manage to fix it for you; and if we can't, why, we'll give you a boost, as we have often done before."

"I'm pretty sure he will have a headache for a while, if it isn't any worse," said Benny,

feeling somewhat proud of his exploit, which was assuredly a creditable one.

"If you had been a second or two late, I'm sartin you would have got his knife," observed Ouden; "so you've earned a ride, even if your crutch isn't hurt."

"I guess it can be made to answer," replied the lad, finishing the examination of his staff. "Anyway, it's good for another whack if a second Indian wants to run the risk, and will do for your heads if you don't behave yourselves, boys."

It would seem that our friends were warranted in believing that they were rid of their enemies for the time, but when all were breathing more freely the hunter uttered the warning "Sh!" that had apprised them of danger once before.

This time it was their eyes, instead of their ears, that told them they were not yet free of peril. Only a short distance up stream a tiny point of fire seemed to be floating downward on the surface of the water straight towards them.

No sound was heard, and Ouden caused not

the slightest ripple as he sheered the canoe toward the southern bank, so as to take it out of the course of the approaching object, whatever it might be.

No one spoke, but all understood the meaning of the strange light; it was the gleam from the pipe of some person coming down the river in a boat like their own.

There was a possibility that he or they were white people, like themselves, abroad on that eventful night, but the chances of this were so slight that no one dare to attempt open communication with them. More likely the strange boat contained several warriors, one of whom was indulging in a smoke, while his companions were swinging the paddles with almost noiseless skill.

Every eye was fixed on the point of light, which advanced with a slow, graceful motion that, under the circumstances, was impressive.

The whites were gazing silently at the glimmering point, when a second appeared so far behind as to show that it was in another boat. Hardly was it noticed when two others seemed to rise from the water so near together and

yet so far removed from the rest as to show they were in a third canoe.

"I'll be hanged!" whispered Ouden, "but there's a big party of them; I reckon they have paid a visit to your home."

The boys answered not, but were of the same opinion.

If such were the fact, the Indians could not have gone up the stream from the main party under the command of Iron Heart, since they would have encountered the canoe in which the brothers floated down the river. They must have entered the water at some point further up, thereby emphasizing the truth of what one of the lads had said to the effect that the surrounding country was swarming with their enemies.

There were three canoes at least, and possibly more, though the glow from the pipes disclosed only the number named. They were descending the river in Indian file, just as the occupants walked when threading their way through the forests and across the clearings.

As they came nearer the faint sound of the paddles could be detected, and, when the lead-

ing boat was almost opposite that of our friends, one of the men made some remark to his companions.

The gruff, guttural words left no doubt of their identity; they were Indians on their way to join the forces of Iron Heart down stream. The great war chief must have sent a summons through the country, and his warriors were obeying it with alacrity that showed how congenial such work was to them.

The hearts of the lads almost stood still when they realized that every one of the boats must pass within a rod of their own, resting quietly on the water. Ah, if there were a moon in the sky or if any mishap should betray their presence, what direful consequences must follow!

The Iroquois could handle a boat with as much skill as Ouden, the hunter, and they would be upon them before they could reach the shelter of either shore. Even if unable to do that, a volley from their rifles would kill or maim every one of the occupants. There was not one of the lads who did not feel sure their friend was running unwarrantable risk

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in holding his place so near the middle of the current, instead of running under the other bank, as he had the chance of doing when the gleam of the first fiery point broke upon their vision.

But it was too late now to shift their position, since a ripple inaudible to ordinary ears would tell the fatal story.

And so, sitting thus, the whites in the canoe waited until the other three had passed by so close that a biscuit could have been tossed into each boat, though it was invisible to the eye.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE FOREST.

ORRIS OUDEN waited only until sure that all of the Iroquois had passed, when he headed the canoe toward the northern bank, against which the prow gently touched a minute later.

Before any of the party stepped out Benny remarked:

"There's a light in the sky off yonder."

His companions noticed a glow that was plainly seen above the tree tops on the other side of the river.

"It must be the moon rising," remarked Tom.

"No it isn't," replied his brother; "there will be no moon for a couple of hours yet."

"You don't know what it means, eh?" asked the hunter, significantly; "wal, s'pose you tell me which way your house is from here."

"It's where we see the light. My gracious, Ouden, can it be that they have set fire to our home?"

"Thar ain't the fust doubt of it."

"And everything will be burned up."

"Rayther say that about everything has been burned up by this time, for the fire must have been going awhile afore we seen it."

The hearts of the brothers were saddened by the sight, for, as will be remembered, they had not brought any of their treasures away, with the exception of the Bible, which Benny had taken good care of up to this time.

But there was a bright side to the affliction; the beloved parents were beyond the reach of the red men, and the boys had left soon enough to escape the peril that must have been very close at the moment they embarked in their canoe.

"Don't forget to think how much worse it might have been," observed Benny, with a cheerfulness that rarely deserted him; "no doubt there will be hundreds of others that will be far less fortunate than we, for all the settlers are not in the villages and blockhouses."

"And we haven't arrived at the settlement ourselves," commented Jack "though we're pretty well on the road."

"I wish we war through that stretch of woods," said the hunter, showing more concern in his voice than at any time since joining his young friends.

"You expect to make it, don't you?" asked Jack in some surprise.

"I do; but I can tell you it's no easy job."

"Why do you take a gloomier view than you did a while ago?" inquired Tom.

"Wal, the truth is, I didn't think thar war many of the varmints up to mischief, exceptin' them that's down the river with Iron Heart, but we have just seen some more, and it shows that the uprising is bigger than most people think. Howsumever," added the hunter, more cheerily, "it's no use of standin' here and talkin' about matters that can't be settled by talkin'; let's pitch in."

Instead of inverting the canoe and carrying it somewhat after the fashion of an umbrella, it was now lifted in its natural position, with the front resting on the shoulder

of the hunter and the rear end on that of Jack Morris. Within the boat were placed the two rifles of the porters, as they may be called, the Bible of Benny Morris, and the two paddies used in propelling the craft when in the water.

An examination of the lad's crutch showed that while the upper portion had been fractured by the ringing blow on the scone of the Iroquois, it was still capable of good service if handled with care. Ouden offered to wait and help repair it, but the owner said it was not worth the time required. It would be soon enough to do that when it gave out.

Since the hunter was most familiar with the woods he took the lead, Benny following immediately behind the canoe, while Tom brought up the rear, ready to take his turn whenever his brother should find the load burdensome.

It was at this time that the fugitives would have welcomed the light of the moon, however faint, for you can readily see the difficulty of the task they had taken upon themselves.

It was necessary to journey fully three-fourths of a mile before daring to return to the Catsuga again. and this was through an expanse of forest in which the darkness was impenetrable. You may say that such a feat is impossible, even for one who has spent all his life studying woodcraft; and such manifestly is the fact, if the guide is deprived of every means of knowing the course he is following, for then he would be literally blindfolded. Since, therefore, Ouden could not make use of his penetrating vision, he was forced to rely on his sense of hearing. Despite the soft flow of the Catsuga through the unbroken wilderness, it gave forth a low, sighing murmur, which the trained ear could identify for some distance.

It was this almost inaudible sound, like the voice of silence itself, upon which the hunter depended. By keeping that within hearing, he could assure himself he was not wandering away from his bearings.

The start had hardly been made when the entire party gained a vivid idea of the difficulties in their path.

The first notice to the leader was when a projecting limb slid under his chin, and, as he expressed it, sawed his neck half off. This took place, too, when he was groping his way with one hand thrust in front of his face.

Jack thought he had the easiest task of all, since the canoe established close relations with his guide, and he had only to walk as the other led. No doubt it was this belief which caused him to be somewhat careless, as was proven when he caught his toe on a root, and narrowly saved himself from going headlong to the ground and bringing down the boat in a general smash.

Benny turned his head to warn Tom to have a care, when the lower part of his crutch became entangled in a vine and he came nigh falling. Finding his brother was not injured, Tom indulged in a quiet little laugh, and had just added some wholesome advice when he banged against the solid trunk of a tree with such force that for the moment he believed he had cracked his noddle. These little warnings served their purpose of making all par-

ties more careful, even though it was at the expense of progress.

Ouden said nothing, but pushed on with the grim resolution natural to him, literally feeling every step, until he must have passed several hundred yards. Then he checked himself for a minute or two, but without lowering the boat, which was not heavy enough to cause any discomfort. Jack, however, at the request of Tom, exchanged places with him.

"Do you hear anything?" asked the hunter, by the way of explaining the cause of their stoppage.

All listened. A faint sighing came to their ears, such as you may have noticed when standing close to a forest on a still summer night,

"It's on our left," said Jack.

"That's whar it orter be," remarked Ouden, "and it shows we're travellin' the right course."

"It comes to me as though the river lies to the right," remarked Tom.

"That can't be onless we've swum across it with the boat on our shoulders," said Ouden;

"do any of you younkers remember of doin' that since we started, being as I don't?"

"Ah, I forgot," the facetious lad hastened to say; "I am facing the opposite way from you, that's the reason."

"How are you making out?" inquired the hunter, addressing himself to the lame member, who replied that he was doing well, was not tired, and his staff still held out.

Everything being in a satisfactory form, the laborious work was resumed and pushed with the same care as before.

By and by the guide began bearing to the left, occasionally pausing for a second or two to listen for the sound that was his sole guidance. Despite the care that was used, every member of the party, with the exception of the hunter, met with one or more mishaps.

Tom, while holding up his end of the canoe, came down to the ground with a violence that endangered the craft itself. Jack fell twice, but was not hurt, nor was Benny, who tumbled once.

Once more the strange procession came to a halt, and each one listened for the sound

that had guided them thus far. They had been considerably more than an hour working their passage. The boys were sure they had travelled over a mile, and were nearly that distance below the Iroquois, whose camp must have been left so far to the south that no one caught the first glimmer of it.

"We must be close to the Catsuga," remarked Benny, who, like his brothers, was struck with the distinctness of the sound.

"So we are," said Ouden; "we orter be within a hundred yards of it this very minute, and I guess we are."

There was general rejoicing at this announcement, which was confirmed a minute later when the canoe was once more placed in the stream from which it had been lifted. An examination showed that it had not suffered from its rather rough usage, and the delight of all was marked as they found themselves again floating, with the guiding paddle in the hand of the backwoodsman, who had proven such a valuable friend to them.

"If the road is clear," said Tom, "we ought to be at the settlements before daylight."

"That's what I expect," was the confident reply of Ouden, "pervided always thar ain't too many varmints in the way."

"We are going fast," remarked Benny, lying back in the boat and enjoying the rest after his laborious walk, "and I'm quite sure we shall arrive on time."

"It don't do to be too sartin—wal, I'll be hanged!"

Orris Ouden had made a most wonderful discovery.

CHAPTER XI.

ORRIS OUDEN'S MISTAKE.

AT the moment Orris Ouden uttered his exclamation he was rounding the bend in the Catsuga, and the cause of this astonishment was the sudden gleam of two camp fires, one on either side of the river.

He had come back to the stream at a point above instead of below the Iroquois encampment.

"It may be another party," suggested Jack Morris, who, like his brothers, knew what it all meant.

"No, sir," was the decisive reply; "it's the identical old show under Iron Heart."

It was ever a mystery to the scout how he came to make such a strange blunder, though he had an explanation that would have satisfied anyone but himself.

He recalled that after starting up the river

in the canoe he had travelled quite rapidly, and the labour of groping through the forest with the boat resting on his shoulder caused the distance to seem much greater than it was.

This explanation, as I have said, would have sufficed for almost any person, but Orris Ouden could not entirely acquit himself for committing so egregious a mistake.

He checked the forward motion of the boat by a tremendous sweep of the paddle, and with an exclamation much more forcible than the former.

"Boys," said he, "when we git down to the settlements don't tell this, or I will never hear the last of it."

His companions were anxious enough to reach that refuge to give any promise. The prospect of landing and making another tiresome tramp through the woods was most unwelcome, but really there was no help for it.

The hunter had allowed the boat to approach near enough to the camps of their enemies to gain a glimpse of the scenes that had already become familiar to him.

A superficial glance, such as he was forced

to take, showed no evidence of the excitement that must have reigned among the Iroquois a short time before. The fires were burning as brightly, different warriors were strolling aimlessly back and forth, and everything indicated a calm in striking contrast to the earlier portion of the evening.

The only point of difference consisted in several canoes drawn against the bank, where they were brought prominently into sight by the bright glow of the camp fire. This proof was not needed to show that the warriors whom they had located by the glow of their pipes were on their way to enlist for the war under the great chief Iron Heart.

"Thar's one thing sartin," added Ouden, for the comfort of his friends, "we won't have to walk half as far as we did awhile ago."

"On which side do you mean to land?" asked Benny.

"I'll try the southern shore this time," he replied, driving the boat in that direction.

"Don't forget that some of them may be prowling over the river, as they were when we were here before."

"I shall depend upon you to whack 'em over the head if they are," was the reply of the hunter, which brought a smile to the faces of all the brothers.

The narrow width of the Catsuga at this point rendered many sweeps of the paddle unnecessary. Within a minute or two of Ouden's discouraging discovery Benny, who had his old seat in the prow, ducked his head to avoid the branches brushing over him, and immediately after all stepped out on land.

"We'll travel the same as before," said Ouden, as the boat was lifted on the shoulder of himself and Jack; "and I'll make sartin of not comin' back to the river too soon, if I have to walk all the way to the settlements to be sure of it."

There was no chance of an error this time, for they were so near the stream that the boys themselves would have detected any such blunder before it could be carried out.

There was no need now of stopping to catch the murmur of the river to guide their footsteps; they were too near the camp of their enemies. When the guide, with a low, warn-

ing sound, checked himself and companions, it was to listen for that which they did not want to hear—the stealthy footsteps of the red men trying to steal upon them unawares.

The hunter trended so far to the south that they left the glimmering lights out of sight, and when they came back they were still invisible around the bend above.

"Wal," said Ouden, with a sigh of relief as the canoe was once more lowered to the water, "thar ain't no mistake about our saccumventin' them camp fires this time. We've got plain sailin' now, always pervided, as I said afore, that thar ain't another passel of 'em roostin' further down stream."

"Ah, see there!"

It was Tom who uttered this exclamation. Though no one could tell the direction he indicated in the gloom, yet they knew to what he referred. A silvery light was making itself manifest above the tree tops and increasing every minute.

"The moon has risen," said Jack.

"And that proves it is close to midnight," added Benny. "But isn't it singular?"

The fact to which he alluded was the course of the river, which was such that the moon appeared exactly between the two shores, thus throwing its light full upon the water. Since the stream wound in another direction above, the rays would not fall on the surface in front of the party until the orb rose over the tree tops. The course of the Catsuga below being direct, they could keep within the light for several miles, even if the moon remained where it was; but since, in the order of nature, it must steadily climb to the zenith, they were sure to have the illumination at their disposal all the way to the settlements.

While this might have its advantages, yet there was enough before the party to make all serious. Ouden referred to several points as they placed themselves once more in the canoe and resumed the voyage, keeping close to the southern shore.

I have no doubt that it has occurred to you that it was incredible that all the preparations I have named as having been made by the Iroquois should have been made for the single purpose of entrapping the family of Varnum

Morris. Not only would the game be not worth the candle, but such a proceeding was out of keeping with the habits of the Indians and absurd of itself.

The hunter had seen enough to convince him that fully a hundred red men were on the warpath in the immediate neighbourhood of the Catsuga above the settlements. It followed, therefore, that they had in view more important objects than the capture of three boys, one of whom was a cripple.

There were other exposed houses between the home of the Morrises and the destination of the lads. These were sure to receive the attention of the dusky marauders, who, it was not improbable, would gather enough strength to risk an attack on some of the smaller block-houses and settlements.

That which caused Orris Ouden immediate concern was the certainty that still other Indians would interfere with their progress down the river. He suspected that the prime object of the meeting of so many warriors up stream was for council. Not only was Iron Heart there, but he had with him several sub-

chiefs belonging to the Senecas and Oneidas. While waiting for all his men to come in, those already gathered were taking precautions to prevent anyone going to the relief of the settler's family, confident that by doing so the whites would drop into their hands like ripe fruit.

The Morris affair, therefore, may be set down as in the nature of a side issue to the real enterprise in which they were engaged.

The hunter had deferred to the wishes of his young friends, but he was far from feeling easy over the matter; yet he looked upon the step as having been taken, and did not allow them to know that he felt any misgiving on that point.

"There's a good three miles," said he, "afore this confounded river takes a turn, and till then it'll be powerful hard to keep out of sight of any of the varmints along the shore."

"And it won't be much better even then," remarked Benny, "for by the time we get so far the moon will be so high that it will strike the river, no matter what course it takes."

"But thar'll be a line of shadder on one of the shores that I can make use of. However, since the time has come when we can turn our eyes to some account, I want you all to do your best, for I can tell you we'll need it."

Thus admonished, you may be sure the boys followed the advice of the hunter. Little Benny seemed to have a mortgage on the front of the canoe, where he settled himself in a comfortable position, and scanned the river and shores with the closest attention. His power in that respect was superior to that of either of his brothers, for, as I have said, nature seemed to make some strange compensations in this remarkable youth.

Next to him sat Jack, with Tom at his elbow, while Ouden held his place near the stern. The lads asked the privilege of helping with the other paddle, but the guide preferred to be left alone in the management of the craft. There were likely to come demands for sudden changes in the course they were following—changes that would have to be made before he could ask or receive the help of any-

one, and which, therefore, were more liable to be retarded than helped by the most willing hands.

The larger boys held their peace, using their eyes and ears for all they were worth, while it need not be said that the hunter himself called his utmost skill into play.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD COUNCIL GROUND.

AS the craft moved silently down the river, with every occupant on the watch, the hunter, holding the paddle in hand, directed his companions' attention to the exceedingly peculiar situation in which they were now placed.

Apart from the fact that there was scarcely any available shadow for several miles, there was the best reason for fearing that at or before the termination of this moonlit stretch of river they would approach one of the most dangerous points along the Catsuga, a fact that had not occurred to the boys until Ouden reminded them of it.

At the distance named was an open space, fully an acre in extent, which was once a favorite spot for the council fires of the Six Nations. It was on the northern bank of the

stream, and I have no doubt that in the long ago, before our grandfathers were born, forest and river rang with many of the most stirring bursts of native American eloquence that ever fired the hearts of the dusky warriors of the forest.

Of late the proximity of the white settlements had lessened the popularity of this resort as a meeting place for the red men. Whenever hostilities, however, broke out between the Indians and settlers, the red men gathered there, though it had become secondary to the one further up the river where Iron Heart and the main body of warriors were encamped.

The hunter and his companions wondered why the assembling had not taken place at the old Council Ground, as it was called, but they felt warranted in believing that some of the Iroquois were there at the same time that the larger party were collected above, though the hunter had escaped them in paddling up stream.

From this you will see the ground for misgiving on the part of our friends, as they re-

sumed their voyage ; but, as if there was not enough in what has been stated, Ouden made clear some other facts that not only were singular but alarming to a degree.

First of all, should it be found impossible to pass the Old Council Ground in the canoe, that plan would have to be abandoned altogether.

On the southern bank was a stretch of swampy and tangled forest through which it was impossible to transport the boat except by daylight, and even then few would like to undertake the task.

The same difficulty presented itself on the northern shore, though the ground there was higher ; but the wood was so interlaced with undergrowth, running vines and dense vegetation, that the work was equally impossible.

It is certainly strange that this combination of circumstances should exist immediately above the Council Ground, where the necessity for another laborious detour was likely to arise ; but such was the fact, and our friends had to accept and prepare for it.

"Ouden," said Benny, at the moment when

the stillness around them was like the tomb, "there's something wrong."

"I'm of that 'pinion myself, and have been for a minute or two," was the calm response of the hunter. "Whar do you see it?"

"There's something moving in the undergrowth on the right and a good ways ahead."

"Gracious, Benny!" said Jack, "you've got mighty good eyes to see that far when there's so little light."

"It is not much that I can make out, but twice, while watching the spot, I have noticed a flash, such as a fish would make in leaping out of the water, by the bank."

"I observed it only once."

"Maybe it was a fish," suggested Tom.

"P'raps," was the remark of the hunter, "but bein' it's so close to the old Council Ground, it's more likely to be some of the varmints on the watch for us."

"If that is so," said Tom, in some excitement, "it won't do to keep on this way."

"It is, and we've got to stir things up," was the quiet remark of Ouden, who turned the boat abruptly to the right as he spoke.

"Now," said the hunter, "comes the tug of war; if we can git by the Council Ground, we can keep straight on to the settlements."

"What are we to do?" asked Jack.

"You three must pick your way through the woods to old Rupert's house, which is a fourth of a mile below the Council Ground. Thar you'll come to the river side, and wait for me."

"For how long?"

"Not long; if I get through all right I'll be ahead of you, for I'll have a good deal less distance to travel, and can do it 'bout ten times as fast as you."

"But something may delay you," said Benny, following his brothers out of the boat, "and there ought to be an understanding as to how long we are to stay there. The night is going fast, and daylight won't be far off when we are through our tramp."

Ouden was silent a moment. He felt the force of what the little fellow said, and it did not take long to form his conclusion.

"If I git into a row—and thar's a powerful chance of my doing so—you'll hear a gun or

two go off; like enough several yells will be thrown in. If you should be favored with that sort of music, you needn't wait more than a quarter of an hour for me, but push on to the settlements as fast as you can travel. That won't be much show for me to give you help."

These were serious words, and all appreciated their import.

"Why not let the canoe go?" was the important question of Benny. "If *we* can walk to the settlements, *you* can do the same without running any such dreadful risk as this."

"I've made up my mind; it's settled; off with you."

And as if to signify that discussion was ended, the hunter gave the canoe an impulse which carried it beyond sight of his young friends. He kept so close in shore that the undergrowth brushed him as he forced his way through it.

"There's no use of staying here," said Jack; "but I don't know which has the most dangerous task before him—Ouden or we."

"Somehow or other I have a feeling that we shall not see him again," added Tom, who followed his brothers, Benny as usual being between them.

They made no answer to the remark, which, in truth, voiced their own sentiments, but addressed themselves resolutely to the work upon the accomplishment of which it may be said their lives now depended.

The start was barely made, when all three realized that the hunter told the truth about the impossibility of carrying the canoe over the same path. The boys were certain they had never struck such a dense piece of forest. It was hard to force their way alone, without anything in the nature of luggage. Several times they were brought to a standstill, and found themselves obliged to make several detours that would have led them utterly astray had their journey been lengthy.

As you have learned, however, Jack and Tom were used to the woods, and they kept within reach of the murmur of the Catsuga, noting carefully their progress, and aiming to return to the stream at the point named by

Ouden. With this guide, Jack was able to retain his bearings and to advance surely, even if forced to do so slowly.

The Council Ground, you will remember, was directly on the river, so that it was in sight from the water. It was this fact which made it so perilous for the party to paddle by, when they would be in plain view of any Iroquois lurking in the neighborhood.

The boys veered enough to the right to pass far around this open space. Whether their enemies were there or not was not for them to determine; that was the task of Orris Ouden, while their own was to effect all the progress they could while the night lasted.

As the minutes passed, and the brothers worked steadily forward without hearing any sound from the direction of the river, their hopes grew stronger. They began to believe he had passed the danger point, and would be found waiting for them when they returned to the stream below the Council Ground.

"I fancy he felt pretty sure of succeeding," said Tom, "but he didn't want us with him, for we would have hindered him."

"If that splashing which he and I saw," remarked Benny, carefully picking his way along on his crutch, "meant what I think, then he is sure to have a brush with the Indians."

"He is used to that sort of thing," added Tom, "and I ain't much afraid he won't be able to fight his way out, but I don't believe he will save the boat."

"Why not?"

"How can he?" was the pertinent question of Tom; "we all saw how they peppered his canoe when it was floating by Iron Heart's party, and half as many shots as were fired at that will riddle *our* craft and anything inside of it."

"They may not fire because they hope to take him prisoner," suggested Jack, though he doubted the probability of such a thing.

"The Indians don't take any more chances *that* way than they have to; and, if they suspect who he is, they'll let drive every chance they have. Whew! but this is hard work," added Tom, as all three came to a halt for a breathing spell.

"How far have we come, Benny?" asked Jack.

"I've kept the best account I could, and think it is about time to begin working to the left, so as to reach old Rupert's house."

"That's my belief, too, so we'll do it. If we are above the place, we can move along shore to it. I don't think there is any danger of our striking the river *below*."

"Hark!" exclaimed Benny in a frightened voice.

No need of his appeal for silence, for at that moment the reports of three rifles in quick succession struck their ears, instantly followed by the unmistakable shouts of Indians.

Sad to say, there was no room for doubt. The direction of the alarming sounds showed that Orris Ouden was involved in one of the hottest conflicts possible with the Iroquois along the Catsuga.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EMPTY CANOE.

HAD the rifle shots been aimed at the boys they could scarcely have produced a greater shock, coming as they did at a time when they were almost certain that the hunter had passed the old Council Ground in safety and was awaiting them at a point below.

For a minute or two no one spoke. They had halted at a spot where enough of the faint moonlight penetrated the partly denuded branches overhead to allow them to see. The expression of their countenances was not visible, nor was it necessary, for all felt the same.

"Ouden has made the worst mistake of his life," quietly remarked Benny, returning his hat to his head, after mopping his brow; "he ought to have let the boat go and kept with us."

"There must come a *last time* with such ventures as his," said Jack, "and it has come sooner in his case than he or any of us expected."

"It looks bad, I admit," added Jack, "but we are not sure he is dead and buried. It isn't the first time he has been fired upon, and there's no certainty that he hasn't pulled through again."

"I don't see that there's any need of our going on to the river," said Tom, "for if he is safe he won't dare to wait for us where he said he would."

"We must keep our part of the agreement," remarked Benny in his quiet, decisive way, that left no room for argument. "Ouden may manage to do what he promised, and if he does, we shall have no excuse for failing in ours."

"And suppose he isn't there?"

"Then we must get to the settlements as best we can. Lead on, Jack; we're losing too much time."

Jack kept the advance, but carefully graduated his pace to that of the lame one, whose

injured crutch caused him some trouble. But Benny was brave, and he pushed on with a vigor which more than once almost brought him against the leader.

"We mustn't imagine we are out of danger," he remarked, during one of their breathing spells, "for if the red men have caught him, they may be close to us."

The chances, however, of running against their enemies in this part of the wood was so slight that little alarm was caused, but manifestly the danger increased as they neared the river.

"We struck it pretty well," said Jack a few minutes later, when they halted once more.

The reason for this remark was the sight of a small, low structure, standing a short distance back from the Catsuga, whose gleaming surface was visible beyond. It looked like some huge, uncouth creature asleep on the ground, without a light or sign of life around it.

This was old Rupert's house, of which I shall soon have more to tell you, it being the spot whither Orris Ouden had directed his

friends to force their way and await his return.

Without halting at the cabin, the lads kept on for a hundred feet past it, and found themselves on the margin of the stream they had left a short time before, all hopeful of soon meeting the brave hunter at the point where they now looked in vain for him.

The spot was close to the water, and deeply wooded, so that none of the moon's rays reached them. They were in utter darkness, but they stood close together, listening and conversing in the faintest whispers.

The scene was impressive. The bend of the Catsuga was still some distance below, but by this time the moon was high enough in the sky to prevent much shadow, no matter what the course of the stream happened to be.

The upper portion of the sky was without a cloud, so that the orb, which was half full, shone fairly upon the river, lighting it to the opposite shore, which looked dismal and forbidding in the gloom. Leaning as far forward as he could, Jack peered up and down the stream.

"Do you see anything?" asked Benny, in a guarded undertone.

"Nothing; I am afraid it is all over with Ouden, for, if he had escaped the red men, he would have found some way of reaching this spot."

"I think so, but there is hope yet. They may have shut him off from arriving here as soon as he expected."

"Shall we wait a while?"

"It will be best, for we want his company, if we can get it, to the settlements."

The brothers seated themselves on the ground, oppressed and gloomy beyond measure. The night was so far advanced that it was impossible for them, under the most favorable circumstances, to reach a point of safety before sunrise. If the Iroquois, who, there was reason to believe, were not far off, should press their search for them, it was more than likely they would strike the trail of the fugitives.

"Sh!"

What seemed the faint hooting of an owl trembled from a point on the other side of the

river, and a short distance above where the boys were grouped together.

"That's one of their signals," said Benny; "but I can't imagine what it means—there goes the answer!"

A similar call quivered from the shore on which the three sat, and so near that all were startled.

"My gracious! They are nearer than I thought," said Benny; "who knows but that signal refers to us?"

"How can that be?"

"I don't doubt that Iron Heart and his warriors have held some communication with the Iroquois near the Council Ground. They know, because of your experience with them, that there were two boys besides the hunter on the river. They may not have learned anything about *me*, but after shooting Orris, and finding he was alone in the boat, they could not fail to understand that both are somewhere in the neighborhood."

"But they have no means of knowing *where*."

"Not unless some of them have caught a

glimpse of us, which I admit is possible. But I cannot see that they have any call to signal to each other about Ouden."

Jack and Tom had such confidence in the sagacity of their elder brother that they credited what he said, though the theory was unlikely in more than one respect.

The growing conviction that they were wasting valuable time by staying where they were rendered all uneasy. Tom proposed they should press down the river to the settlements without further delay, but Benny insisted on waiting a short time longer, in the hope that something definite would be learned about their absent friend.

"Jack," whispered Benny, a minute later, "it seems to me I heard a rustling just above us, as though some one was moving through the bushes."

All held their peace for a brief interval, when the truth of the remark was evident; there was a soft sound, such as would have been made by the means named.

"I'll take a look," said Jack, rising to his feet.

No Indian could have moved more stealthily through the wood than the youth as he left his companions. Even the unusually keen ears of Benny failed to note his progress the moment he passed from among them.

It seemed, however, that he had not been gone five minutes when the two heard a low, guarded whistle.

"That's Jack," whispered Benny. "He has learned something and wants us to join him."

Tom had also recognized the call, and it took them but a brief while to reach their brother, who had paused on the bank of the stream, and was in such a state of indignation that he forgot to speak in a whisper.

"What do you think of *that*, boys?" he asked, pointing to the form of a canoe which they recognized as their own. "That's the rustling we heard."

A glance at the boat, as revealed in the moonlight, showed that the paddles were gone, and it had been hacked by the knives and tomahawks of the Iroquois until its usefulness

was wholly destroyed. It had drifted with the current until heard by the listening youths, and Jack had seized it by the mangled gunwale as he signalled for his brothers to join him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

THE brothers were right when they decided that Orris Ouden, the frontier scout, wished to be free from them because of the perilous nature of the enterprise in which he was about to engage.

After driving the canoe down stream just far enough to place it beyond their sight he checked it and listened until the faint sound of their footsteps could no longer be heard.

"I guess the younkers will not have any trouble in picking thar way to old Rupert's house," he muttered, "which is a good deal more than I can say for myself."

It must not be forgotten that the hunter was led to make his dangerous attempt by something more than the simple object of befriending the lads, toward whom he entertained a strong affection. He was in the employ of General Pierpont Greenfield, who had charge

of the American interests in that quarter, and it was his duty to learn all he could gather about the intentions of Iron Heart and his warlike Iroquois.

It might seem that he had already obtained enough for practical purposes, but it was necessary to know precisely what was going on at the old Council Ground, and this he believed could be done best in his canoe.

His decision having been made, it may be said that he now stripped for the fray. His rifle was slung on his back, leaving his arm free, but the weapon could be snatched round to the front on an instant's need. Observing that Benny Morris had left his precious Bible in the boat, he placed it forward out of his way, and then, seating himself near the middle of the craft, with one paddle at his feet, he grasped the other and began, or rather resumed, his voyage down the Catsuga.

Sight and hearing could not have been trained to a finer point than they were with the scout, who merely guided his boat without suffering it to go faster than the sluggish current along shore.

All his attention was fixed on the point where he and Benny had observed the singular flashing of the water. This was on the northern side, being the same along which he was feeling his way. This, too, was a short distance above the broad, natural clearing known as the old Council Ground. It looked, therefore, as if he was going directly into danger, and such was the fact. Ouden hugged the shore so closely that part of the time he passed beneath the overhanging branches, which were turned aside with such care that it would have required wonderfully keen ears to detect his progress. The main purpose in doing this was to secure a portion of the shadow that was beyond his reach further out in the stream.

Without noise he checked the canoe when still a hundred feet above the spot he held in such dread. He had detected a dark object projecting from the undergrowth, which he knew was a part of a boat like his own.

This explained what had puzzled him and the lame lad. The flash that had caught their eyes was that made by the toying of a

paddle in the water, the moonlight happening to strike it so that the reflection was visible.

"The varmints are thar," thought the hunter, "and I don't know whether it'll pay me to try it or not."

He held the craft stationary several minutes, awaiting developments before venturing further. He had not yet reached a decision, when it was forced upon him.

The Indian boat suddenly pushed out from the shore, until it was fully revealed in the moonlight, and came toward him. The action showed there were three warriors within, though only the one at the rear was using a paddle.

"I wonder if they've seen me?" was the thought of Ouden, who felt the situation growing exceedingly delicate.

He and his boat, so far as he could judge, were enveloped in the luxuriant vegetation, but he could not know that the sharp vision of the Iroquois had not detected some joint in his armor.

With that quickness of thought which had become second nature with him he grasped

the heavy limb that put out over his head, and deftly and silently drew himself out of the canoe, which, thus relieved of his weight, resumed its course down stream in a straight line, for the Indian craft was coming up.

Thus the Iroquois that had set out to find a foe discovered, all at once, the prow of the scout's boat almost upon them. It looked as though he had accepted the challenge, and was hurrying to meet them on their own ground, or rather water.

This was so unexpected that the oarsman, in obedience to a guttural exclamation of one of the others, suddenly backed water, doing so barely in time to avoid a collision.

The movement, in conjunction with the advance of the hunter's boat, shifted the situation of both a rod or two down stream before the upper boat came within full view of the Iroquois.

At the moment when this took place the Indians saw that the other craft was approaching without any occupant in sight; but, not doubting that some one was crouching in the bottom, all three brought their rifles to a

level, discharged them almost simultaneously, and then, with several whoops, paddled swiftly to the boat.

They had fired their shots so low that, as you have learned, the canoe was perforated near the water line, and they knew that whoever was inside must have suffered fatally.

A minute was enough to reveal to the Iroquois that they had been somewhat hasty in their rejoicing, for the strange canoe contained nothing except two paddles, and a large, heavy volume in the prow. He or they who must have been sitting in it a brief while before had vanished as though they had never been.

One of the Iroquois leaned over and transferred the paddles to his own boat. Another, no doubt with peculiar emotions, took possession of the Bible. Having come upon what may be called a wreck, they plundered it of its cargo, and then, rather curiously, allowed it to float off, while they returned to shore.

Meanwhile the white man made the best of his opportunity. From his perch on the overhanging branch he peered through the

interstices and watched every movement of the Iroquois.

Since they showed no disposition to investigate further, he cautiously worked his way to shore, stepping so gently upon the hard earth that he was without fear of having betrayed himself.

"Them varmints have a qu'ar way of doing business," was his conclusion. "If I was only sartin thar wa'n't any more of them around, I would let drive among 'em, jist with the idee of stirrin' things up a little; but it's mighty sure they ain't all."

He was close to the old Council Ground, and he began stealing in that direction, it being necessary to go some distance before picking up any interesting knowledge.

At the point to which the canoe and its three occupants had withdrawn there was another boat, large enough to contain a score of warriors; and on the bank under the trees which fringed the Council Ground was that number, who seemed to be awaiting the coming of some person, or the occurrence of an expected event.

Ouden drew a sigh of relief.

"Wouldn't I have made a pretty mess of it," he thought, "if I had took the youngers by that clearin' or tried to do it myself!"

The Iroquois, numbering more than a score, that were grouped at this spot, had avoided starting a fire, which accounts for the narrow escape of our friends from running into the ambush.

Since they seemed to do considerable talking, Ouden crept as near as he dared in the gloom and listened, hopeful of something that would give him a clew to the object that had brought the party thither. In this he was unexpectedly successful. A few minutes sufficed to tell him they were Oneidas, and he was familiar enough with their tongue to keep the drift of their utterance.

They were awaiting the coming of Iron Heart. Instead of going to the upper encampments, where that noted chief was with his main band, he must have promised to join them at the place which had been the scene of so many warlike assemblages.

Ouden's explanation of this was that some

enterprise was on foot in which the smaller party were to be the sole actors, and of which Iron Heart wished to keep the others in ignorance, or at least meant they should take no part. But that was a question to be settled in the near future.

Since, however, it was all-important to know what this was, he decided to wait awhile, despite his promise to the boys to join them down the river. He knew they were likely to become weary of waiting, and to start off on their own account, especially as he had told them that the reports of guns were to be taken by them as a fatal indication.

Men who lead the life of Orris Ouden learn among its rudiments the virtue of patience. His position was an uncomfortable one, since he was obliged to rest on his hands and knees, and the slightest shift was extremely dangerous. He knew all the Iroquois were not in his immediate front, since the affair of the canoe must have caused some to search through the immediate neighborhood for the white persons. These scouts would soon be returning, and if any of them should happen

to stumble over the crouching figure of a white man (a not improbable occurrence), it would, to say the least, prove unpleasant for one or both.

Fortunately, however, Ouden was not kept long in suspense. Although he could not see distinctly, he heard the Indians continually moving about, and by and by one of them uttered words which the eavesdropper interpreted to mean that the expected party was at hand.

There was a bustle of excitement, and the next moment a canoe shot around the projecting limbs and ran into shore at the feet of the waiting Oneidas. From the small boat stepped two of the warriors, and the first greeting uttered revealed that one of them was Iron Heart, the Seneca war chief.

CHAPTER XV.

IMPORTANT NEWS.

ORRIS OUDEN felt that he was at the post of duty. Imminent as was the peril in which he was placed, no inducement could have taken him from the spot. He stood on the threshold of momentous information, and Providence only could compel him to withdraw before it was secured.

The stir among the Oneidas was such that their voices were unconsciously raised, and barely a word escaped the listener. He recognized the clear, penetrating tones of Iron Heart, one of whose most noticeable characteristics was his fine voice.

Without attempting to give the utterances of this remarkable sachem, or following the discussion, it is enough to say that within fifteen minutes after his arrival at the old Council Ground the whole scheme or plan of cam-

paign was known to the white man, crouching so near that a few steps would have brought several of the Iroquois against him.

I have spoken of the settlements along the Catsuga, for the reason that there were two of them. Both were on the northern shore, the distance between them being less than a third of a mile. A curious wrangle, to which it is not necessary to refer further, caused a division of the first party of pioneers and the founding of two towns which long ago coalesced, and to-day form one of the most enterprising cities in America.

The settlement toward which our friends were hurrying, and which, of course, came first in order in descending the river, was much larger than the second, which it had rapidly outgrown. It was provided with a formidable blockhouse and garrison, under the command of General Greenfield, a veteran of the Revolution. Its strength, indeed, was such that it cannot be said it was in danger from even so formidable a confederation as the Iroquois or Six Nations.

Beyond it lay the smaller settlement, as I

have told you. It contained less than a dozen cabins, but these were strong and capable of effective defence.

It was the location of the lesser town, however, that General Greenfield considered its chief security; for to attack it the enemy would have to pass to the rear of the larger settlement, whose garrison could be hurried at once to the relief of the other. It would seem that such a scheme was hopeless.

And yet that was precisely what Iron Heart had decided upon. Most likely his reason was that of the man-eating tiger of Asia, which, as if to avert suspicion, sometimes passes through one native village at night and seizes his victim in a town beyond, returning through the former without molesting any of the inhabitants.

Since no white man was likely to believe the smaller settlement was in danger, little preparation would be made against the attack, and for that reason true generalship suggested the assault.

You will understand that, to be successful, this must needs be of the whirlwind order.

The deed must be begun and over before General Greenfield could get help to his neighbours. Iron Heart had decided that the attack should be made just before daylight, that being the favourite hour for such work with the American Indians. The time was the following morning—being something more than twenty-four hours distant.

From some expressions overheard by Ouden, he believed the Iroquois leader had first intended his assault to take place at once, but decided to wait in the hope of accomplishing much greater results. He was not yet fully informed of the general situation, but he meant to assail the smaller settlement with impetuous fury, holding the main body of warriors back until a portion of the larger garrison was well on the way to the assistance of the other.

An effort would be made to ambush the relief party and cut them off. Iron Heart knew this was difficult, since he had to deal with veteran campaigners in Indian warfare, whom it was hard to deceive in that manner; but the chief was one of those leaders that are always ready to take chances.

The only misgiving the hunter felt was that the attack on the smaller settlement would be made at daylight, which was now at hand. There was time enough for the smaller party to reach the neighbourhood, but since the campaign involved the employment of the larger party along the river above, the plan was almost impossible, even for a body of warriors capable of moving with such celerity.

From what had already taken place, Iron Heart knew that one or more of General Greenfield's scouts were on the watch, and there could be no doubt that the movements of the Iroquois would be reported to the American commander; but the chief was not unwarranted in believing that his real intentions would remain unsuspected.

Having gathered the all-important knowledge, the delicate duty of withdrawing from his situation remained. The absorbing interest felt by the Indians in the scheme prevented them being as much on the alert as they generally were, but this could not be expected to last.

Ouden did not need to be told what the

result would be if he were discovered near the assemblage. He was so well known to Iron Heart and his warriors that they were eager for the chance to put him to the torture. Apart from their nature, the success of their atrocious plans demanded that no hint of it should reach General Greenfield.

The stealing of a shadow across the clearing could not have been more noiseless than the retrogression of Orris Ouden from the Iroquois encampment. He did not dare to turn, but, keeping his face toward his foes, recoiled inch by inch, feeling his way, as may be said, with his feet.

This went on well enough until he had passed a rod or so, and was on the point of turning about, when he became aware that one of the Indians was almost upon him.

The very danger he dreaded had come; an Indian scout, by a natural result, had been led, on his return, to take a course that brought him directly to the white man on the ground.

There was just enough moonlight stealing among the limbs to render detection certain,

if the warrior continued his advance in the line he was following. It would never do for Ouden to be caught in such a disadvantageous position. He sprang to his feet, and with a single step placed himself behind the nearest tree.

In the act of doing so he caught the faint outlines of the Indian in his front, and knew the savage had seen him. Instantly the warrior asked in a low voice :

"Who is my brother?"

"It is the Wild Cat," replied Ouden, in the same guarded tone, doing his utmost to disguise it.

Had he hit upon the name of some other warrior, possibly he might have succeeded in deceiving his foe, but it happened that the Indian named was not in good standing with the Oneida who heard it pronounced.

"The Wild Cat is a dog," was the unexpected exclamation, accompanied by a forward bound at the white man.

Sudden as was the attack, it did not catch Ouden unprepared. He had held his knife in his hand from the moment he began with-

drawing from his position as eavesdropper, and it was grasped with the firmness of one who knew he was liable to be called upon to use it any moment.

Besides, the leap of the Oneida gave the defender an advantage in that his assailant uncovered himself, and in the dim light the hunter discerned not only the sinewy form, but the upraised arm with the knife in hand.

The situation being such, the only fear of the defender was that his foe might utter a cry that would bring his companions to the spot before Ouden could extricate himself. His gun was still suspended behind his back, so that his arms were free. The left hand shot forward like a piston-rod, seizing his assailant with crushing force by the throat, and shutting off his power of breathing. At the same instant the right did not fail in the stern duty required of it. No Indian was ever forced to succumb with such suddenness to an antagonist.

Ouden stood a minute, listening intently. There was nothing from the direction of the Council Ground to show that Iron Heart or

his warriors had heard the brief struggle, and he picked his way back in the wood, until able to move with more assurance and without the constant dread of encountering his foes.

"Them younkers have got tired of waiting long afore this," was his truthful conclusion, as he approached the spot where he had hoped to meet them; "if they git sight of that canoe with the holes in it they'll conclude it's good-by to Orris Ouden, and won't lose any time in pushing on down to the settlements."

With the aid of the moonlight the hunter's familiarity with the woods enabled him to travel with as much certainty as though the sun was shining. He turned at the right point, and approached the river at the spot where the odd-looking structure known as old Rupert's house stood. He merely glanced at it as he passed, and observed that no twinkling light was visible.

"I reckon the chap ain't at home," was his conclusion, as he pressed on to the stream, which he reached at the very point where his young friends arrived nearly an hour before.

It was at this moment that a dismal, quivering whoop was heard from the direction of the old Council Ground.

"They have found the varmint that run agin me," said Ouden grimly to himself, "and it's natural that they shouldn't feel very well pleased over the matter. Wal, the youngers got tired of waitin', sure enough, and have cl'ared out."

He whistled softly, but there was no response, nor did he discover the canoe, which, as you know, had drifted to the place. The boys, seeing that it was no use to them, had allowed it to float down the river.

"Maybe I can overtake 'em," was the thought of the hunter, who little suspected the strange difficulties in which his young friends had become involved.

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD RUPERT.

THE individual to whom I have referred several times as old Rupert was one of those characters the like of which are still found in some parts of our country.

His full name was Rupert McGurchen ; he was of Scotch descent, and had lived in a hut of his own construction from a period antedating the arrival of the pioneers of the settlements near.

He appeared to be between fifty and sixty years of age, was small of stature, tough and wrinkled, active and powerful. He preferred to be left entirely alone, repulsing the advances of his own race, and refusing to affiliate with the Indians, to whom he was well known.

Perhaps the general belief that his early life had been darkened by some tragedy which

sent him to live alone in the American wilderness, was the true explanation of his hermit life.

His hut consisted of a single room, less than half a dozen yards square. It had one door and several narrow openings for windows, while a small hole at one corner of the roof served for a chimney when he made use of a fire on the hearth of bare ground. This rarely took place, since in the coldest weather his stock of peltries enabled him to keep comfortable.

Old Rupert in some respects was remarkably ingenious. There were many evidences of his skill, in his peculiar home, in the shape of nicknacks, toys and little contrivances which he used in his dealings with Indians.

The floor of his hut, instead of being the ground, as you might think, was hard, smooth planking, over which he had spread a carpet of bison and bear hides.

I must mention one peculiarity of his home. The logs and stones of which it was composed were covered with a thick layer of earth. This rendered the structure incombustible,

not because of the sods themselves, for an attacking force could readily remove them, but they kept so much moisture in the logs that no fire could be made to ignite them.

You need not be told what an immeasurable help this was to the defender. Thousands of lives would have been saved on the frontier could the settlers have been safe from the torch of the red men.

The openings in the side of the structure were four in number beside the door. One was close to the latter, so as to command to some extent its approach, and all were so narrow that the slimmest warrior that ever skulked through the woods could not force his body through them.

While old Rupert took these precautions against the treacherous people around him, his first step was to win the good will or at least the indifference of the Indians, who, if they could not compass his ruin while in his castle, always had the means of shooting him down in the woods.

So the queer old fellow visited the different tribes, and gave his presents right and

left. He secured many valuable pelts in return, though he seemed to care little about bartering for them. His lonely life naturally led the Indians to believe he felt no good will toward his own race, and the hermit took pains to encourage this belief. This naturally went a long way toward conciliating the Iroquois.

At the same time justice must be done him. If he disliked the companionship of his own people, he showed no wish to do them harm. It was through him that General Greenfield, and now and then some of the exposed settlers, received warnings of danger in time to avert woeful consequences.

The General appreciated old Rupert's delicate situation, and did not presume upon it. He offered to reward him for the valuable information he brought, but the hermit refused, and asked, in return, that no white man should ever come near his cabin.

The reason for this request was manifest; if he received visits from his own people it was sure to become known to the Indians, and would awaken distrust. Not only would

his safety be endangered, but all opportunity to befriend the settlers would be at an end.

General Greenfield, therefore, cautioned Orris Ouden, and every one whom he sent on scouting expeditions through the woods, to keep clear of the sod-covered hut near the Catsuga. His orders were obeyed, so far as the officer's subordinates were concerned, though the hermit was sure to have calls now and then from others. But the reception of these was of that nature that a second visit was averted.

Although the Morris brothers knew of old Rupert's antipathy toward visitors, they would not have hesitated to present themselves at his door had there been reason to do so.

They stood beside the Catsuga in the gloom, examining the wrecked canoe that had drifted down to them from above.

"Since the paddles are gone, the boat is of no use to us," said Jack. "I thought we might manage to plug up the holes, but that would be hard work, and we couldn't get along without the paddles."

"Is my Bible there?" asked Benny, in an anxious voice.

"No," replied Tom; "I thought of that, and have examined every part of the inside."

"I don't suppose Ouden would have bothered himself with the book, and it must be the Indians have captured it. If they could only read what it contains it would do them good."

"Well," said Jack, after a half hour had passed, "we have waited a good deal later than he told us to, and I am opposed to staying any longer, when we know we can't get to the settlements before sunrise."

"I'm ready," said Benny, "but I'm afraid my crutch has given out."

"That makes no difference," was the response of Tom; "we will carry you, for you must be pretty well tired out."

"I feel able to walk the whole distance, and prefer to do it. Let's call on old Rupert. It won't take me more than a few moments to fix my crutch, for he has everything to do it with, and then we can get along a good deal better."

"The old fellow doesn't like visitors."

"I know that, but he won't refuse me, for

he understands the Indians aren't much afraid of me, anyway."

A few minutes' conversation fixed the plan.

There seemed to be no red men near, so that little risk was involved in separating for a short time. Benny's crutch answered for the brief walk to the front of the cabin, which he meant to take alone.

Old Rupert could show no ill-will toward a halt person who came to his dwelling unarmed, nor could the Indians themselves find fault with such a proceeding. On the contrary, if he took with him his big brothers with their guns, more than likely the hermit would refuse them admittance.

So Jack and Tom said they would wait on the outside, just far enough away to avoid discovery, while holding themselves ready to give the little fellow any help he might need.

There was nothing to be criticised in this arrangement, and Benny hobbled out into the moonlight, in full view of anyone on the watch in the odd structure, and under the eyes of his brothers in the margin of the wood. They surveyed him affectionately,

prepared to rush forth on the first appearance of danger.

Benny felt no misgiving in taking this step, though there was just enough uncertainty about the hut and its inmate to cause his heart to beat a little faster than usual.

The cripple had been inside several times, and it was in his presence that old Rupert thawed out more than to any one else. Though he never asked Benny to visit him, the latter felt that, to say the least, he would not turn him away when he presented himself at the door.

As he anticipated, he found the latch string out, but, before pulling it, he thought it best to knock.

He did this several times and pronounced the name of the hermit; but he was either absent or asleep, and the lad twitched the latch string.

Instantly the door swung inward, and all was intense darkness. Benny remembered the interior well enough to know where he stood. He again called the name of his friend, but there was no answer.

"He is not here," concluded the youth, "but I must have a light before I do anything."

Producing his own flint, steel and tinder, he set the sparks flying, and in much less time than you will suspect had lit an old-fashioned oil lamp that stood on a stand at the further end of the room.

This gave a full view of the interior, which, as I have said, was familiar to him. There were the furs covering the floor, with others hanging on pegs at the sides, the fireplace, the stand, the short bench, the tools, bits of wood, playthings, gimcracks, and many indescribable products of old Rupert's ingenuity.

Benny Morris felt no hesitation in using the chance thus given to mend his crutch. The faint odor of cooking meat in the room proved that old Rupert could not have been gone long, and was likely to return at any moment.

Benny hoped he would come while he was at work on his crutch. The lad seated himself at the bench near the stand holding the lamp, and set to work without delay. The

fracture was not serious, and he expected to complete it in a very few minutes.

His fingers wrought deftly, and he was giving the finishing touches when he heard a sound of feet, as though some one was running in great haste. Whoever it was, he was approaching the hut. Benny faced the door supposing it was old Rupert, for whom he had left the string hanging out; but the next instant Jack, with Tom at his heels, rushed in.

"What's the matter?" asked the frightened Benny.

"Matter enough," replied Jack, as he hastily drew in the latch string. "The Indians are after us!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FOREWARNED AND FOREARMED.

BENNY MORRIS was amazed at the alarming news brought by his two brothers.

"We never thought of such a thing," exclaimed Tom, turning toward the cripple, "but they must have seen you when you went forward."

"Why do you think so?" Benny inquired.

"You hadn't been gone more than five minutes when we caught sight of them sneaking along near us. We drew back among the trees and watched. They said something, but we couldn't make out its meaning."

"How many did there seem to be?"

"We saw a half dozen at least, and there were more," replied Tom.

"There could be no mistake as to what they were after," added Jack, "and the mi-

ute they moved around far enough to give us a chance we made a break for the door."

"And here we are!" continued Tom; "and what's to be done? Where's old Rupert?"

"He doesn't seem to be here. I have just mended my crutch, and was about to come out to you."

"It's mighty lucky you didn't; they would have nabbed us all; and as it is now, I don't know what is to become of us."

"Well," said Benny, recovering to an extent his composure, "I don't believe they will be able to get in here or to get us out for some time. Old Rupert built it good and strong, as he showed me more than once. They can't set fire to the logs, and the windows are too small for them to enter."

"But the door is big enough."

"True, and yet when fastened it's as strong as the side of the house itself. No, brothers, we're as secure here for the time as if we were in the fort with General Greenfield."

From this brief conversation you will understand that the rush expected by the boys when they dashed through the door did not

take place. It was a piece of good fortune that opened the way for the break, the Indians moving round to the other side of the hut, so that they could not have seen the youths, who had only a short distance to run, until they dodged into the shelter.

Had it been otherwise, it would have been an easy matter to bring them down with their rifles, though it must have puzzled the red men for the moment to understand the meaning of the sight.

It was well enough for the boys to know they were secure for the time, but it cannot be said the outlook was cheerful. So far as they could discover, there was not a mouthful of food or a drop of water in the hut. Their enemies, therefore, had only to hold them there for several days, when they must be conquered by their own sufferings.

"It strikes me," said Tom, "that that lamp ought not to be burning, for it may give them a view of the interior and tempt a shot at us."

Benny believed his brother was right and blew out the smoking lamp, leaving all three in utter gloom.

"Now we must keep away from the windows," added Benny, "for they will fire at a venture, and if we are careless we'll be likely to catch them."

"More likely they will catch us; but daylight can't be far off."

"Less than an hour."

"Suppose old Rupert comes back," said Tom, who, like the others, seated himself on the bench near the door, out of the way of any stray bullets; "won't he be apt to think us rather impudent?"

"He won't find fault when it is explained, and we can't help it if he does; this is the only place that offered any chance to save ourselves, and we were bound to take it."

"It might have been better if we had hurried on down the river side," suggested Tom, "instead of turning here in the first place."

But the wise Benny thought differently.

"Though it didn't look as if the Indians were near us at the time, they must have been, and at daylight would be sure to get on our tracks, and nothing could have saved us."

"Then it seems to me our only hope is in Ouden."

"And how in him?"

"He will find out, sooner or later, if he is alive, that we are shut in here, and will take some means to get us out."

"I should like to know what that means," was the significant remark of Benny; "Iron Heart wouldn't like anything better than for a small party—or a large one, so far as that goes—to come from the settlements to our help. He must have at least a hundred warriors around him already, and there will be plenty more. He will have enough to cut off any force General Greenfield can send to us."

"Whew!" muttered Tom; "from the way you talk, Benny, we have no show at all."

"I don't say *that*; God can do anything, and I am sure He will open some way of escape, though I cannot see it now. We can pray and hope and wait."

The boys were disappointed in not hearing anything of their enemies for a long time. They expected that some kind of attack would

be made the instant after Jack and Tom rushed into the hut and withdrew the latch string, but the minutes slipped by and everything remained as still as a tomb.

Jack crept to the door and held his ear against the lower crevice, through which a thin, cold draught of air rushed, but he could detect no sound.

Despite the risk, Tom did the same at all the windows in turn, and with a like result. For some reason the Iroquois were inactive and silent.

Now it unfortunately so happened that it was only a few minutes after the extinguishment of the light that Orris Ouden stole through the woods close enough to old Rupert's house to detect the outlines of the structure.

Moving with the care he always showed when there was a shadow of danger, he did not betray himself to any of the red men lurking near, and they little dreamed that the famous scout, for whose scalp they would have given any price, stole by within a stone's throw of where they were crouching in the

shadow, debating in what way they should encompass the destruction of the young men that had taken refuge in the hut of old Rupert.

Had the Oneidas made an attack, as the youths expected them to do, the hunter would have caught the situation at once, and, it is safe to say, taken a hand in the extraordinary events that followed; but he was warranted in believing his young friends had grown weary of waiting, and, pressing on to the settlements, were already a long distance in advance.

He therefore headed down the river, threading his way through the woods, but keeping away from the water, which there was no chance of turning to account.

There was no beaten path to follow, without plunging much further in the forest than he desired, and he was confident the young fugitives had kept to the route he was pursuing. He was hopeful of coming up with them, and at intervals he made the signals with which they were familiar; but you need not be told that none of them brought any response.

He was quite near the main settlement

when day broke. He began scanning the ground near him, but was disappointed to discover no sign of a trail. He reflected, however, that it would have been more singular had he succeeded, since, there being no path, it was not to be supposed he had dropped into their footsteps.

It was yet early in the day when the hunter presented himself at the strong block-house where General Greenfield commanded the garrison, and made his report.

That brave officer commended the scout in the warmest terms for the success of his enterprise. He had not thought of such an attempt as that on which Iron Heart had decided, though, from his knowledge of the wily leader, he was prepared for almost any act of daring on his part.

Forewarned was forearmed in his case. Confident of his own ability to withstand the attack of the whole Six Nations, he was without any uneasiness for himself and those under his immediate charge; but he requested Ouden to proceed to the lower village without delay and make known the peril that threatened it.

The hunter was expecting such orders, and he promised that the message should be delivered within the same hour that he brought it to the General.

Ouden knew the brothers would not go to the blockhouse at once on their arrival, and, hopeful of finding they had taken shelter with some of the settlers, he made inquiries, which needed to be only few in number to tell him that they had not yet emerged from the wilderness where they were in such peril.

"They ain't here, that's sartin," he said to himself, with a heavy heart, as he set out for the lower village, to obey the instructions of General Greenfield; "but I'm hopeful they'll arrive agin my return."

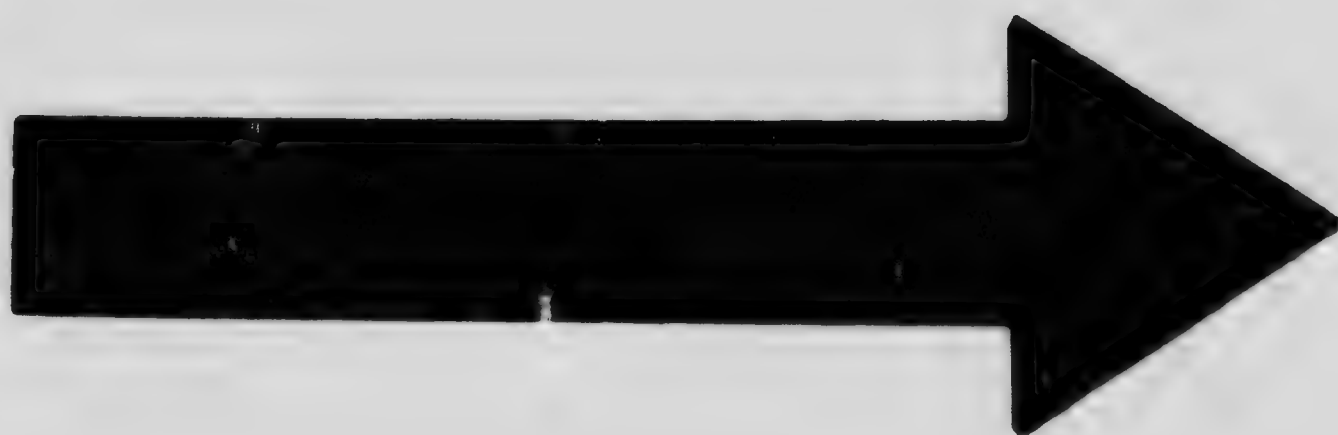
The important tidings in his possession were delivered to the settlers below as he had promised, and it was fortunate that he did so, for he found that absolutely no precautions against a surprise had been taken. Had the assault been made that morning with the impetuosity that Iron Heart always displayed, nothing could have saved the pioneers.

But such communities need only brief no-

tice of the kind of danger which threatened them, and before the sun was high in the heavens the brave settlers were prepared for the worst the Iroquois could do.

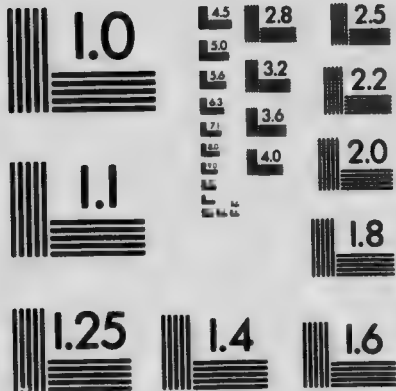
Leaving them to look out for themselves, Ouden returned to the upper settlement. As he feared, the boys had not come in, and nothing could shake his convictions that they had not been overtaken by disaster.

"I don't know what I can do for 'em, if I can do anything at all, but I'm going to *try*," he said, compressing his thin lips, and striking again into the wilderness.



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CHAPTER XVIII.

BESIEGED.

NATURALLY the brothers in old Rupert's house explained the inactivity of the Iroquois on the ground that they were aware of the uselessness of an open attack on the structure. It could not be doubted, however, that they were keeping sharp watch and would detect any attempt of the besieged to steal out.

You will understand that, the windows of the hut being very narrow and the outside banked with earth, the view from within, when the sun was shining, was quite incomplete. The openings were of little use or defence, except when the assailing foe was careless enough to get directly in front of them—a contingency unlikely to occur.

"*There's somebody here,*" whispered Tom, from his station near one of the windows.

"I hear him," whispered Benny, who had quietly stolen to the spot, Jack quickly doing the same; "don't get in front of the window or you will be hit."

A moment's listening convinced all that one at least of their enemies was *doing something*, though precisely what it was could not be determined just then.

"I know," suddenly said Benny; "he is moving the earth away from the windows."

"What is that for?"

"Perhaps he imagines it will help him to get at us, though I can't see how."

"It will surely give us a better view when daylight comes," was the remark of Tom Morris.

"How would it do to fire out of the opening, just to let them know we ain't asleep?" asked Jack, eager to give the miscreants a shot.

"No," said Benny, who abhorred everything of the kind, "don't fire unless you have to; they haven't hurt us yet."

"But they are mighty anxious for all our scalps, and I don't see the sense of waiting

till they pepper us before we take a crack at them ; nothing will suit them better."

"Do all the shooting you want to when the time comes, but remember they haven't fired a shot at us yet."

It was not the principle of Tom and Jack to hold their peace when such a chance presented itself, but their deference to their lame brother was too deep to defy his wishes openly, and neither did so. The real beginning of the strange conflict, however, was nearer than any one imagined. All at once the boys were blinded by a flash in their very eyes, and the interior of the hut rang with a report of a gun, fired so close to their faces that the smoke was driven into the apartment.

The Indian, working so quietly on the outside of the window, had done so with the hope of gaining a better chance for his blind shot at the defenders.

The ears of the boys were still tingling with the report, when Jack hastily jammed the muzzle of his rifle into the opening and let drive. That he hit something was proved by

a resounding screech, as startling as the noise of the gun, and the unmistakable sound of a falling body.

"That's right! that's right!" called out Benny, "fire as often as you can; they began it."

As yet everything in the cabin was in utter darkness, but before our friends had fully recovered from the shock they saw that the day was breaking. A dim light began penetrating the narrow openings, and by and by they were able to distinguish each other's forms and faces.

Avoiding the windows, they awaited the perfect day. The assailants seemed contented for the time with the single demonstration that had turned out so disastrously for them, and it was a good while before anything more was heard.

"I admire old Rupert for one thing," remarked Jack, who had reloaded his gun.

"What is that?"

"He has made the cabin just as strong as it can be; it's worth a dozen houses like ours in such a fight."

"That is true; they have no way of getting inside or of setting fire to it, but there's one slip," added Benny.

"What is it?"

"No provision seems to have been made for such a siege as we are in for. Now, if he had only stored up several weeks' supply of dried meat and a barrel or two of water we could snap our fingers at Iron Heart and all his warriors."

"Maybe there is something that we haven't noticed," said Jack, beginning a search of the room, now that daylight was fully come.

"Since there isn't any water," remarked Jack with a laugh, "I am sure I never was so thirsty in all my life."

"And I am famishing," added Tom.

"And I'm both hungry and thirsty," said Benny. "But we've got to grin and bear it. It will be a long day, yet we must be thankful that we have such a shelter, instead of being out in the woods."

"Since there is very little for us to do," remarked Jack, some time after, "why not take a nap? None of us has slept a wink since

night before last, and we're pretty well tired out."

"A good idea," said Benny; "I was about to suggest the same thing, for there is no need of staying awake."

"Old Rupert certainly believed in good beds," was the comment of Jack, as he stretched out on a soft, luxurious bear skin, which had been tanned with such skill that it was without any unpleasant odor.

His brother imitated his action, and, strange as it may seem, every one was sound asleep within the next ten minutes.

It was fortunate that the opportunity came to them, for they not only needed the refreshment because of present fatigue, but it was sure to fortify them against the severe task yet before them.

Not an eye was opened until the forenoon was half gone, and even then, Benny, who was the only one that awoke, would not have done so but for external cause. He slept more lightly than his brothers, and when a faint tapping broke the stillness of the hut he instantly rose to a sitting posture and looked

at the door, on which some one was timidly knocking.

"Who's there?" he called out, without rising from the floor. It so happened that he was near the door, and his question was so modulated that neither of his brothers was disturbed.

"Old Rupert," was the reply; "let me in."

Benny reached out for his crutch, rose, and cautiously limped to the door. It was the easiest thing in the world for him to raise the huge latch, or he could have shoved the end of the leathern string through the orifice over the fastening and allowed the applicant to help himself.

But the sagacious did neither. The voice sounded like the hermit's, but Benny took no chances.

Stepping close to the opening, he found he was just tall enough to peep through the small hole intended for the latch string. He did so. The view through such a tiny aperture was slight, but it was enough to disclose part of the hunting dress of an Iroquois warrior standing directly in front

of the door. No doubt other Indians were grouped around him, ready to rush in the instant the way presented itself.

"That's a pretty smart red man," thought Benny, "for he knows how to imitate old Rupert's voice better than I can, but he isn't smart enough to fool me."

Then applying his mouth to the side of the door, the youth asked:

"Are you alone, Rupert?"

"Yes—alone—let in!" was the impatient reply of the warrior, who knew the risk of speaking too often.

Benny had nothing to gain by prolonging the interview or pretending to believe he did not penetrate the trick.

"It won't do, my brother," he said, changing to the Oneida tongue; "you are not old Rupert, and you can't come in."

The youth expected some kind of assault to follow, but nothing violent took place. The Indians were heard muttering together, and a minute later they moved off.

Benny now examined the door, and was startled to observe that it was only partly

secured. The heavy latch was in place, and would have offered a stout resistance to pressure from the outside, but had the Iroquois flung their bodies against the structure a number of times it must have yielded at the very time the lads were confident of its impregnability. An immense cross-bar dropped in place just below, and then the door was secure indeed.

"My gracious!" gasped Benny, as he stood back and contemplated what he had done. "How forgetful that we did not think of that before, and how fortunate that the Indians did not try to crush it in! Heaven is watching over us."

He looked at his brothers, who lay on the furs, sleeping as sweetly as he had seen them do so often in their own beds at home. They were the pictures of robust health, and his heart warmed toward them.

"I am grateful that I have not only the best parents in the world, but two such splendid brothers," he murmured, his eyes growing moist; "they would die to save me from suffering, and I would gladly do the same for

them. Let them sleep, for they need the rest."

But while the words were in his mouth, Tom and Jack opened their eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TARTLING VISIT.

THE big brothers were not a little astonished when told what had taken place while they were unconscious. They were not surprised to learn how deftly Benny had acquitted himself, for, in truth, it was no more than they would have done under the circumstances.

"They must have thought us verdant," said Jack, "to hope we would let anyone in without being sure who he was. I don't think it would be safe to admit old Rupert himself, if he should knock."

"But wouldn't he be mad to find himself shut out of his own house!" said Tom; "and we couldn't blame him."

The curiosity of the lads now led them to take sly glances from the narrow windows, though Benny repeatedly cautioned them about exposing themselves.

Little satisfaction was gained from these hasty views. Once Tom caught a glimpse of an Indian, but you know the field of vision was limited, because of the small size of the openings through which they had to gaze.

Jack undertook to draw the fire of the vigilant Iroquois by exposing his hat on the ramrod of his gun, but the red men must have suspected the artifice, for they never once discharged a weapon, though they could not have failed to see the headgear.

Then Benny, who, like his brothers, felt a need of food, and especially of drink, searched through every corner of the hut, hoping some supply that had escaped them could be found; but, if such was the fact, it also eluded him, and he was obliged to get along on nothing more substantial than the air they breathed.

As the afternoon wore away the boys sat on the soft furs and talked over the situation, for it was evident to all that something must be done before the sun rose again.

"Yes," said Benny, "if no help comes to us to-night, we must help ourselves."

"Can you think of any way it can be done?"

Tom and Jack knew from the face and manner of their lame brother that he had been pondering deeply over the question and had something on his mind, though he was backward about making it known.

"The first part of the night will be very dark," said he; "in fact you know there will be no moon until near midnight."

"Then why not, at the time the gloom is the deepest, open the door and steal out?" asked Tom.

"Don't you suppose that that is the very thing they are waiting for? Don't you know that they have only to leave three or four of their warriors on guard? And doing that, can you think of any way by which we could escape discovery?"

To these questions of Benny Jack answered, after thoughtfully scratching his head:

"There's precious little hope, I admit; but my plan wasn't for all to try it, but only for one. I think there's one chance in a dozen for me to creep far enough to get a start for the woods; and if I once reach them, I'll take care of myself."

"And what then?"

"I'll hurry to General Greenfield to get him to send enough men to help you out before Iron Heart can bring his warriors here to prevent it."

It was a desperate scheme, but Benny shook his head.

"It will throw all the danger on you alone; I don't believe you will ever reach the woods alive, and our situation would be worse than before."

"I think it too risky," said Tom, shuddering at the thought of his brother placing himself in such danger.

"I would be glad," replied disappointed Jack, "if you could name something which isn't full of danger. I ain't any more anxious than you fellows to lose my scalp, but some one must take the risk, and why not I?"

"I am not without hope of help from Ouden," replied Tom.

"Why do you think he can give us aid?"

"I know we about concluded last night that he was no more, and there's no denying it looks bad, but so long as Benny doesn't

give him up why should I? If he did manage to elude the Iroquois," continued Tom, "he has made his way to the spot where we were to meet him, which isn't far off. Not finding us, he has hurried to the settlements to report to General Greenfield and find out what had become of us. It hasn't taken him long to learn we haven't reached safety. Then he has turned about to hunt for us."

"But how can he learn we are in this place?"

"He'll come back to the spot and there find our trail. Ouden can beat any person I ever saw following a faint path through the woods, and it won't take him long to locate us."

"There's truth in what you say," observed Benny, "but I can't base much hope on it."

"Why not?"

"For the reason I gave a short time ago: Iron Heart has enough warriors to prevent General Greenfield rescuing us, even if he came out with his whole garrison."

"That's the bad feature about it; but, Benny, what's the use of holding back?"

You've got an idea in your head, so let's have it and decide if it is good for anything."

"I have a scheme which came to me just after the knocking at the door and before you awoke. It is this: We will start from the door, after peeping out and finding that the coast is clear, as it is likely to be, and take a start for the woods, but I will go first."

The twins looked at him in amazement.

"You first?" exclaimed Jack. "Why, you would be sure to limp right into their arms."

"No doubt of that."

"And what good would that do?"

"I don't think there are many Iroquois on the outside, because there is no need of it. They would be likely to make for me the moment they saw me, and then, if you are spry, you could dodge in another direction and give them the slip."

There was the plan of Benny, being nothing more nor less than to sacrifice himself for the others.

Tom and Jack looked at him steadily for a moment, and the latter, straightening up as he sat on the floor, said in a tremulous voice:

"I wouldn't do that for all the world; would you, Tom?"

"I would die a thousand times before I would permit it."

"You don't look at it right," the lame one hastened to say, as he swallowed a lump in his throat. "It wouldn't do for either of you to try such a thing, for you are strong and able bodied, but you remember what we said about the kindness of the Indians towards persons that are helpless like me."

"Yes, I haven't forgotten what you said, either," replied Jack, with a shake of his head; "it isn't likely they would show you any favours, especially if they saw—as they would be sure to see—that the whole thing was a plan to save us. No, sir; our dear brother, there ain't many things in which we wouldn't obey you, but that's one that it's a waste of words to talk about."

Tom reached out and shook Jack's hand, to signify he endorsed his sentiments unreservedly.

"I supposed that would he upshot of it," remarked Benny, with a smile, prouder

than ever of his brothers ; "and that brings it down to the point that we'll all be saved or wrecked together ; but, all the same, I am sure you are making a great mistake in not accepting my offer. I don't claim any credit for self-sacrifice, for it isn't that. I can tell you that I have very little fear about going right among the Iroquois. If I was sure of meeting Iron Heart the first one I wouldn't hesitate."

"You know he is the cruellest of them all."

"Yes, but I feel acquainted with him ; I have seen things that make me believe he has a heart, and I don't believe he would hurt me, if I walked straight up to him and asked him to be my friend."

The lame one presented the picture in alluring colors, but he could not deceive the brothers, who had accepted his own estimate of the American Indian. They were not to be persuaded, and he gave over the attempt.

"Well," said he, with a faint sigh, "I am through ; I have nothing more to offer."

"We may wait till night, and something

may turn up then that we can't think of now."

"I am not in despair; I have spent a good deal of time in prayer," said the gentle lad; "I am sure you have done so, too. God will not forsake us; he has been very kind, and I shall trust him to the end."

"Look!"

While speaking, the lame lad was reclining on a bearskin, near one side of the room, his brothers being opposite to and a few paces in front of him. The exclamation of Tom was caused by Benny suddenly pitching forward on his face, as though uplifted by some force from below. The skin on which he sat had bumped upward in a most extraordinary manner. Before anyone could understand its meaning the pelt was cast aside, and the head and shoulders of an Indian warrior rose from the floor and stared at them.



“The head and shoulders of an Indian warrior rose from the floor”

CHAPTER XX.

WELCOME DISCOVERIES.

THE instant Jack Morris saw that it was the head and shoulders of an Indian warrior that had been thrust upward through the floor he leaped to his feet and grasped his rifle; but in the act of bringing it to his shoulder, Penny, who had recovered himself and glanced around, called out:

"Hold! Don't you see that it is the Wild Cat?"

"Huh! Wild Cat won't hurt," said the Mohawk gentleman, who now deliberately crawled through the opening, closing the trap-door behind him and replacing the bear-skin over it, after which, with the same stolid expression, he faced the lads, who were standing side by side and facing him.

By this time, as you may suppose, the brothers had recovered from the shock caused

by the strange apparition coming through the floor of the hut. Their first thought naturally was that the Mohawk was the leader of a procession that had dug under the building and was about to stream into the interior.

But such was not the fact. The Wild Cat came alone, and, so far as he knew, not a solitary Iroquois was aware of what he had done.

"Who dreamed of such a thing as a subterranean outlet to old Rupert's hut?" asked the delighted Benny, looking around in the faces of his brothers, who hardly knew whether to rejoice or not.

"How came old Rupert to tell you about it?" asked Jack of the warrior.

"He no tell Wild Cat. Wild Cat find him."

"And how came you to do that?"

"Great Spirit show Wild Cat."

The reply, it may be said, lacked the quality of definiteness. The boys were anxious for particulars, and the halt one took upon himself the task of drawing them out.

"Did you know of the way here before today?"

The Mohawk shook his head vigorously, adding :

"Oneida out dere—one, two, three, so many;" and he held up the fingers of both hands, opening and closing them twice, thereby signifying that the number was twenty, more or less.

"That is what we suppose; is Iron Heart with them?"

"He goes up river—wid Senecas and Mohawks—to fight he go down river—shoot at settlers."

"I don't think there is much danger of his hurting General Greenfield and the folks," was the comment of Benny, thus proving the wisdom of the Iroquois chieftain in deciding to make his first assault on the smaller settlement. Even the old man did not suspect his purpose.

"How long have you been here?" asked Jack, impatient at the delay of getting at the fact they were seeking.

"Not long—two—three hours."

"Then you were not present this morning?" was the inquiring remark of Benny,

taking up the examination again. "Do you know whether any of the Oneidas were hurt by a shot from us?"

For the first time the face of the Mohawk was lit up with something like a grin.

"Yes—Big Horse—he walk dis way."

And the Wild Cat limped back and forth across the floor several times, much as Benny himself might have done had he been deprived of his crutch.

The boys laughed, for the sight was an odd one, and somehow or other, despite the malevolence of the Iroquois, the youths felt relieved to know that they had not killed any of their enemies, though they had come fearfully near doing so.

"Wild Cat felt bad," said the Mohawk, taking up the thread of his narrative; "tink Injin kill paleface—he walk down riber all alone—no one wid him—he sit down—some-thin' tell him look under bush—den he see big hole—he crawl in—he crawl good way—bime by he hear paleface talk—he bend his ear—know they be his friends—den he raises his head—here be Wild Cat."

This broken narrative made the facts clear. It was evident that the discovery of the underground passage was accidental.

It followed, therefore, that in all probability the secret channel was unknown to everyone except old Rupert himself. The boys were mistaken in condemning him for not making full preparations against a siege, since no preparation could be so full as that which furnished a secure means of withdrawal whenever the place should become untenable.

But thrilling thought! If the Wild Cat could enter the hut from beneath, those that were imprisoned were able to make their way out by the same passage. Not one of the boys had referred to this fact, though the thought came to each the instant he learned the means by which their ally had joined them.

But the youths craved water more than anything, and the news that the passage opened out on the edge of the river caused them to feel like rushing off, regardless of discovery by the Iroquois.

When the proposition was made to leave

at once the Wild Cat shook his head, signifying it would not do to try to do it before night. Some of the Oneidas were so near the outlet of the tunnel that it would be impossible to avoid them, except in the darkness, especially as one of the party was halt.

"If any should find the opening by which the Mohawk entered," said Jack, with a shudder, "it would be the end of us."

"I don't know about that," replied Tom. "Old Rupert must have some way of holding the door down. Let's look."

The robe in the middle of the floor was drawn aside. It was then seen with what remarkable skill the hermit had concealed the real avenue of escape. Had all the peltries been removed no person would have suspected its existence. True, there were the lines marking the boundary of the small, square door, but they resembled so perfectly the natural crevices and turns in the rough wood of which the floor was composed that each lad could not repress his admiration. They had never seen anything like it.

Not only that, but the iron ring—the great-

est telltale—was so placed that it suggested nothing of its purpose. It could be turned in a way that secured the door against being opened from below.

It required only a few minutes for the boys to learn how everything worked. Then the doughty Jack pulled the ring, and with one powerful pull drew back the door, the Mohawk looking silently on with little expression of interest on his face.

An exclamation escaped Jack, who, stooping, called out:

“What have we here!—thank the Lord!”

The fervent exclamation was uttered as he drew up a large stone jug, within which was heard the gurgling of water—the sweetest music that could fall on their ears.

The corncob stopper was quickly withdrawn, and it was just like Jack to place the opening at the mouth of Benny’s parched lips, saying:

“Drink! there’s enough to go round.”

The little fellow never took such a deep, refreshing draught of cool water in all his life.

“Oh!” he sighed, when at last he was filled,

"it's worth half dying with thirst to enjoy such a bliss as that."

Jack offered it to Tom, who shook his head, and the former swallowed a draught that he insisted he enjoyed clear down to his toes. Tom was equally extravagant in his praises, which, after all, could not be too extravagant; for you, who have never known what real, burning, consuming thirst is, cannot understand the ecstasy of quenching it with the most delicious element—even though it lacks color, taste and smell—that God has created.

Tom and Benny sat for a moment or two almost overcome by the excess of relief, but Jack was busy exploring the mysteries of the bonanza that had just been opened.

"I knew it," he exclaimed, drawing up a loaf of dark brown bread, well baked; "the next time I meet old Rupert I shall ask his pardon for not believing him to be the wisest man since the days of Solomon. There is plenty more of it down cellar."

"Anything else?" asked Tom, springing to his feet and reaching for one of the hunks.

"What do you want?" demanded Jack, reprovingly, "three or four cooked buffaloes?"

"That's it exactly, and I wouldn't mind if the order was doubled."

"Well, you won't get it here; if you don't like this boarding-house, you can pay your bill and go elsewhere."

It was an entertaining sight, that of the three boys eating the bread with such ravenous appetites. They all owned good sound teeth, and buried their faces in the luscious staff of life.

Even the stolid Mohawk looked at them with a twinkle in his bead-like eyes, though he said nothing, content to see them enjoy the meal.

"Just to think," said Benny, when the curious dinner was finished, "but for the Wild Cat we would have perished for want of food and water that were under our feet."

"I don't know," said Tom, "whether it's best to hurry from here; I'm willing to wait a week or two until the Indians get tired out. How much bread left, Jack?"

"Five or six loaves."

Tom shook his head with a sigh.

"That won't do; if there were several hundred we might stand it for a week, but with such appetites as ours we would have to give up before to-morrow night."

"If we should find the danger too great," remarked Belny, more seriously, "it would be wise to wait another twenty-four hours, for the Oneidas would be likely to grow weary."

CHAPTER XXI.

A DEPARTURE.

IT was not yet the middle of the afternoon when the Wild Cat made his startling entry into old Rupert's cabin, and for more than two hours there was no move on the part of the inmates toward leaving the place, where they were secure for the present.

You can understand why they were so willing to wait. Hunger and thirst were fully satisfied, and it was the counsel of the friendly Mohawk that no attempt to leave by the "underground railroad" should be made before the dusk of the early evening. Since the brothers believed the same, they remained in conversation that was all the more pleasant because of the depression of spirits preceding it. But during the talk the boys learned some interesting facts that had a bearing on what followed.

The Wild Cat was in a more delicate situation than his young friends supposed. He had been known for a long time as well disposed toward the settlers, but no more so than Iron Heart himself during certain periods of profound peace. From some cause or other, however, he was under suspicion of his comrades, who watched him more narrowly than anyone else.

As a consequence he was forced to be circumspect. He had joined the warriors that were rallying at the great chieftain's call, and the Wild Cat did not scruple to say that the only ones for whom he cared were the Morris family, who had always treated him so well.

His entry into the hut by the tunnel was unsuspected by his brother warriors, for it had been carried out with all the skill at his command, but the trouble would come when he went back to his allies and tried to explain the cause of his absence. No other Indian received half as much attention, and the Mohawk clearly saw that a storm was brewing for him.

The boys were not surprised to learn that

the vagrant Pete was among the most clamorous for their death. No one was louder in demanding that the settlers should be cut off to a man, and he seemed eager to do his full part in helping things.

But Benny Morris was quick to note that the Wild Cat was incurring a risk for which there was no call. Why need he stay in the hut, when he was not expected to give any further help to the fugitives?

The lad therefore advised him to take his departure so as to lessen the time for which he was likely to be called to account.

"We will stay," added the boy, "till it becomes dark, and then, if the chance is fair, we'll steal out and start for the settlements. You will be nowhere near, and won't be accused of giving us help."

"Unless he is seen crawling out of the hole he went in and the Iroquois find the underground path to this hut. Then he will be in a hole sure enough."

"The Wild Cat is too wise to be caught that way," observed Tom, "for, according to my way of thinking, it was much harder for him

to enter than it will be to leave without detection."

"It isn't imposible that some of the Iroquois know where he is at this moment."

But Benny shook his head at this suggestion of Jack.

"It is out of the question ; if they had discovered it, some of them would have followed him and stirred us up long ago. His own safety requires him to get away from the opening without being noticed, and I haven't a fear that he will fail."

"It must be well concealed to elude discovery so long."

"How is the opening, Mohawk?" asked Benny, turning toward their friend, who was trying to understand their conversation.

"Close to water—bushes hang ober all 'long—can't see when warrior go by in canoe."

"How was it you came to find it, then?"

"Sit down to rest—don't see hole—stretch out moccasin—bushes bend down—den Wild Cat look—see hole—look agin—see hole more dan see afore—stoop ober and look—

den see more hole—can crawl in—go good way—come here—see?"

There could be no doubt, from the Wild Cat's account, that his presence within the hut was unsuspected by the Oneidas, and when it was proposed to him that he should withdraw, he appeared to feel the wisdom of doing so.

Before leaving, however, he did an imprudent thing. Not the least sound had been heard on the outside since his arrival, and, like his young friends, he thought there was a possibility that most of the warriors had withdrawn from the immediate neighborhood. There was no means of learning this, and it is difficult to tell why he made the attempt.

First, the Mohawk bent his head at the door and listened for several minutes. Nothing was detected, and he then began a cautious peering through the slim windows. At the second he received a startling set back.

Confident that whatever watch the Iroquois were maintaining of the hut was not a strict one, he raised his head and shoulders, so that

had any one been looking in he could not fail to observe him.

And this is precisely what took place. By a singular coincidence an Oneida, having crept close to the hut, went through exactly the same movement, the heads of the two Indians rising from the ground as if both were impelled by the same machinery, and within twenty inches of each other. It was only for an instant, each whisking out of sight like a flash, but it was enough.

Whether the Oneida had recognized the Mohawk or not the latter had no means of knowing, but he identified the latter as Black Buffalo, one of the fiercest foes of the white men to be found among the Six Nations.

The boys noticed the quick movement of their friend, and Benny suspected its cause. He deemed it best, however, to say nothing, while Tom and Jack, observing that the Mohawk offered no explanation, held their peace.

The day was waning. There was no call for staying, and the Wild Cat said he must leave his friends. Whatever were his emo-

tions over the blunder he had committed, he failed to give any sign of it by his manner. He was the same glum warrior that emerged from the opening in the floor of the hut and joined the astonished youths.

The trapdoor was once more drawn back, and when the Indian carefully descended he was seen to be standing with his waist on a level with the floor. Then once more a grin lit up his painted features. Extending his hand, he shook each warmly in turn, stooped carefully down, and disappeared, as you have seen the pantaloons do in the pantomime.

The boys did not replace the door, but sat for a minute or two in silence.

"I wonder why he dropped his head so quickly when he took a look out the window," said Tom.

"He acted as though some one saw him," added Jack.

"And that's just what took place," remarked Benny; "the Wild Cat is cunning, but he made a sad mistake. I thought he was foolish when he started toward the window, but I did not say anything for his

people are very jealous of any interference that seems to reflect on their wisdom."

"If the Iroquois have learned he was within the hut, it will be bad for us."

"But worse for him," said Benny; "for how will he explain his failure to let the others know that he had learned the way to the inside? Had he not shown himself, they never would have dreamed of such a thing."

"He may try to make amends for his neglect by confessing the truth and showing them the way."

It was Jack who uttered this disquieting remark, and both he and Tom looked anxiously at the lame brother, in whom they felt such faith, to learn how the possibility struck him.

The handsome face was darkened by a disturbing thought, whose meaning was shown by his remark:

"We cannot blame a heathen for acting out his nature; if he finds there is but one course to escape the wrath of Iron Heart, will he not be likely to take that course?"

"If that's the way you talk, the best thing is to close that trapdoor!" exclaimed Jack, springing to his feet, letting down the strong structure and fastening it against any assault from below.

"He may find some way of getting out of the scrape," added Benny, always disposed to take the most hopeful view of things; "and perhaps, after all, the warrior did not recognize him."

That, however, was so faint a hope that little was based upon it. The incident could not fail to dampen the spirits of all.

"I'm going to make a little investigation of my own," said Jack, rising to his feet.

"What is that?"

"Before we trust ourselves within the tunnel we ought to know more about it. It isn't very long, and it won't take a great while to creep to the opening and return."

Jack looked at Benny for his permission, and the lad did not refuse it, only warning him that he could not use too great care, for it seemed more than likely that a number of their enemies were grouped near the opening,

and a slight indiscretion on his part would be sure to betray him.

But Jack was a wise lad, and he stood in no need of such counsel. He had stooped over to lift the door, when he was arrested by the sound of a rifle-shot on the outside, so close that all were startled.

Letting go his hold, he straightened up with the question :

“What can that mean?”

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER DEPARTURE.

THE question was a natural one, but no one could answer it better than he who asked it, and of course he could not. Stepping hastily from his position over the trap-door, Jack peeped out of one of the narrow openings. Seeing nothing, he did the same at the others, but, so far as he could judge, not a soul was in sight.

"Maybe one of the Iroquois thought his gun wasn't loaded and pointed it at his friend in play," suggested Tom.

"That would be too good luck for us," replied Jack, adding: "Well, take care of yourselves till I come back. It won't be dark for some time, and I hope you'll not get scared."

And with this light good-by he went down into the ground and vanished, as the Wild Cat had before him.

Of course the door was left open, that no obstruction should be offered to the return of Jack, which might be more speedy than was anticipated.

It was about this time that the Iroquois on the outside showed unusual activity.

The sounds of their footsteps were heard, reminding the lads of so many wolves trotting around a sheepfold at night, vainly hunting for some means of reaching the helpless ones within.

Benny, who took his station near the door, knew that a group of them were there, for he caught the sound of a voice or two at intervals, and he was certain they tried the structure more than once. The others, standing some distance away, fired several shots into the planking, probably hoping the bullets would force their way through; but Benny smiled at all such efforts. Old Rupert had displayed too much wisdom in building his home to leave any "open door" for the admission of enemies.

Nothing less than a cannon ball could demolish the structure, and, so far as is known,

the American Indians have never been addicted to the use of artillery.

Little Benny Morris, with his subtle power of penetration, gave an interpretation of this act of the Iroquois which there is reason to believe was the true one.

No doubt you know that when an army is preparing for a charge it frequently cannonades the enemy for a time. This is meant to silence, as far as possible, the guns of the foe, or perhaps to keep him so engaged that the task of the charging infantry or cavalry becomes less dangerous. Sometimes, too, an attack of that nature is intended to disguise the real purpose of the assailants.

The lame boy suspected that the unwonted activity of the Iroquois after such a long silence was a cover of a withdrawal of most of them, whom Iron Heart needed elsewhere.

If those within the hut had formed the belief that the besiegers had become weary and left they were now apprised of their mistake. The Indians would think the whites too terrified to steal out, though that might seem to be the very thing desired by the be-

siegers. Since, however, the youths were not likely to attempt that, the assault might force them into yielding. Should they refuse, perhaps the most of them would withdraw, leaving a sufficient number behind to take care of the lads.

Had Benny Morris been a vigorous, active youth like his brothers, he would have insisted that, shortly after dark, a break should be made for the woods. He was so confident that the majority of the Iroquois intended to go away that he would have felt sure that by such a bold course their freedom could be secured, but personally he was able to do nothing. He wished in his heart that Tom and Jack would make the attempt, leaving him behind to meet the Indians; but he knew better than to propose it, and he therefore held his peace.

These thoughts were passing through the mind of the youth while he stood by the door, when he was surprised by a sharp knocking.

"Hailoo," said Tom, "has old Rupert come again?"

Benny raised his hand for his brother to

keep still, and the summons being repeated, he asked :

"Who is there?"

"The brother of my paleface."

Suspecting the Indian was an Oneida, Benny addressed him in that tongue.

"What does my brother want?"

"Let my brothers come forth, for Iron Heart and his warriors wait to take their hands."

"Is Iron Heart there?"

"The great war chief is with his warriors."

This answer was indefinite, and Benny added: "Let Iron Heart come to the door, and his white brothers will talk with him."

The request evidently nonplussed those around the door, for they talked several minutes. Benny tried to catch some of their words but could not.

"Iron Heart is with his Senecas; he will soon come back."

This reply confirmed the lad's suspicion that the major part of the besieging force had withdrawn, and caused him to feel confident

that if the escape through the tunnel should be found impracticable, Tom and Jack could reach the forest by a quick dash.

"When he comes back, then will his pale-face brother talk with him," said Benny; "but his brothers will not go out of the house to shake hands with the Oneidas, for they cannot trust them."

"The Oneidas will treat the palefaces like their own brothers; but if they do not come forth, then will they burn down the cabin and take the scalps of the palefaces."

"Why have the Oneidas waited so long? If they want to burn the house where their brothers are, let them try to do so; but they cannot burn it, for we have food and water, so we may stay here till General Greenfield and his soldiers come and drive away the red men."

To these rather pointed remarks the warriors scorned to reply; perhaps they couldn't think of appropriate terms in which to do it. At anyrate they must have felt it was a waste of words to parley, and so they gave it up.

During the strange conversation, Tom had

placed himself near his brother. Lacking the remarkable power of Benny in picking up different tongues, he was unable to catch the meaning of what was said until it was afterwards interpreted to him.

"Benny," said he, shortly after, "it's time Jack got back."

"I think so, though we must give him some grace. He knows we won't leave until after dark, and probably wants to gather all the information he can."

"I hope that's it," remarked Tom, in a voice which told plainly enough he did not believe it to be the true explanation.

The brothers were silent for nearly a half hour longer, too much distressed to say anything. Tom's situation was near the open door through which Jack had been expected so long.

By this time night was descending over forest and river, and the interior of the hut took on its old appearance of gloom. They drank from the jug of water, but neither felt any desire for food.

"Find out whether you can hear anything," said Benny, in a low voice.

Tom had been listening, but he now lay down on his face, with his head over the opening and turned sideways.

"Yes," he repeated softly, "there is a soft roar like that of Ontario through the woods."

"It is the Catsuga flowing by the opening of the tunnel; do you hear nothing else?"

Tom listened a while longer, and replied that he could identify no other sound.

"You have sharper ears than either Jack or me. I will help you into position to listen."

Taking the lame lad in his arms, Tom carefully lowered him into the opening, waiting till he was ready to be lifted out.

"That will do," said Benny, shortly after; "help me up."

Tom deposited him on the floor with the gentleness he always showed toward the cripple.

"The tunnel is empty," said the lad.

"Then Jack has left!" exclaimed the astonished brother.

"Yes, he has passed out, and of course has some good reason for doing so."

"He may be crawling carefully through it, but is too far off for you to hear him."

"No," was the decisive reply of the brother; "it may be that I could not hear him creeping over the soft earth, but the motion of his body would produce an effect on the murmur of the river that I could have noticed."

This indicated fine work on the part of Benny, but he was capable of it.

"Suppose that for some cause Jack is motionless in the tunnel?"

"If there was any reason why he should remain motionless as long as I was down the opening, that might answer, but there is no such reason," returned his brother.

"Well, I mean to find out," added Tom, "if you have no objection."

"I wish you would do so, for I am distressed."

Thus encouraged, Tom Morris entered the opening and followed after the Wild Cat and his brother.

Neither of the two ever returned.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEFT ALONE.

THUS, by a strange concurrence of incidents, Benny Morris, the most helpless lad of the three, was left alone in old Rupert's house, as the gloomy autumn night was closing over forest and river.

He was glad of the fact, for, now that he was free to do as he chose, he had made up his mind what course to follow.

His fear was that Jack, despite the caution he generally displayed, had been tempted to venture outside the tunnel, and found his return cut off for the time. If such were the case, it was more than likely he had been killed or taken prisoner.

But Benny was not yet prepared to accept this as truth until he received proof.

He recalled that, although he and his brothers had been besieged for a considerable

while in the hut, and though some shots were fired, yet none of the Iroquois had been killed by the defenders; the Indians, therefore, were without pretext for unusual cruelty towards the Lads, even though one of their warriors had been hit hard from within the building.

This, united with the fact that the small garrison consisted of boys alone, and that one of them was helpless and had always been somewhat of a favorite with Iron Heart and his warriors, inclined Benny to believe that the Iroquois would not kill them outright so long as there was a chance of making them prisoners.

And beyond all this lay the temptation to test the disposition of the great chieftain toward himself personally.

But the youth was one who always thought of others before himself, and his whole line of action was laid with a view of helping Jack and Tom. Though the former had been tempted out of the tunnel, Benny was confident that the latter would be too circumspect to run into danger unless it took a form that no one dreamed of.

"It must be," he thought, "that when the

Catsuga rises with the spring floods the water backs nearly to this hut, for the bank is slight; but the current is low now, and there can be no such trouble as that."

In the darkness of that lonely room the lad quietly sank upon his knees, helping to sustain himself by his crutch, and spent some minutes in prayer to that God whom no one could have worshipped more devoutly than he. His communion with his blessed Master had been close and inestimably sweet from his earliest infancy, and his devout, loving nature had done more to curb the exuberance of his brothers, when it threatened to break all bounds, than any other influence.

Long as was the period occupied in prayer, it would have been still longer, under the exceptional circumstances, but for a new fear that began creeping into his heart.

Enough time had now passed for the return of Tom, but he came not. He was too careful to incur any unnecessary risk and unwilling to leave the helpless one alone except for cause beyond his control. What that cause was Benny could not guess.

"I wonder whether the Wild Cat ran in to the same trouble that has kept Tom and Jack from coming back! If anything happened to them it seems to me I ought to hear of it."

He moved from window to window, halting awhile at the door, listening for some sound from the direction of the river that could give him a hint, but none came. It was fully night, and, when he peeped forth, nothing but black darkness met his gaze. The soft murmur of the deep woods and the calmly flowing river were the same that he had heard many a time when he lay on his trundle-bed at home waiting for sleep to close his eyelids; they were old sounds, and yet ever soothing and delightful.

"I believe," said he, standing by the door once more, "that if I undid the fastenings and went out I might hobble all the way to the woods without being stopped, but I don't think I'll try it just yet."

The lad's interest, however, centered at the opening through which he had prayed the brothers might appear. Leaving the door, he reclined upon the floor, with his ear close

to the hole which, as he felt, had swallowed up all his friends.

Everything had become quiet once more, and the stillness in the room could not have been more profound. He was able, therefore, to concentrate all his faculties in the single one of hearing, which, as you know, was cultivated to a wonderful fineness.

Minute after minute passed, during which the same soft, soothing murmur stole through the tunnel, when all at once his heart gave a quick throb.

There had come what might be called a discord in the music. The hollow sighing was broken; some person was in the passage. The youth did not stir, but shutting his eyes, as if the gloom itself interfered, he listened.

Yes, some one had not only entered the tunnel, but he was slowly feeling his way forward; he was approaching the hut, and must soon reach it.

But what of the identity of this person? Was it Tom or Jack, or both, or was it one of the Iroquois? That was the all-important

question which must be decided within the next few minutes.

Benny, with his puny strength, might find himself unable to open the door that closed the tunnel, but he was quite competent to shut it. The door did not fall entirely back when raised, but sustained itself just beyond the perpendicular, and a slight effort would drop it in place.

A cautious man in Benny's situation would have closed the entrance without waiting. Thus he would be secure against any foe, and, in case the one approaching was a friend, he could readily make himself known and lift the obstruction out of the way.

But the listener was not quite ready. His nicety of hearing enabled him to note the advance of the person, who, he was satisfied, was near the middle of the tunnel.

The fact that he was moving slowly pointed to his being a stranger, since neither Jack nor Tom would have lost any time in rejoining their brother, from whom they had been separated longer than any one anticipated.

Not only that, but the listener discovered

that the individual occasionally halted in his progress, as though tired, or because he felt misgivings about where he was going.

"I am afraid it isn't Tom or Jack," murmured Benny, with a sharp pang, "and I don't know what I will do. If I was sure ill had befallen them I wouldn't care what became of me."

But just then the thought of his father and mother roused the energy of his nature, and he resolved to do his part toward defending the hut in the only way that was left to him. By this time the stranger was close at hand, and the lad grasped the upper part of the heavy door.

As he did so he caught a muttered word, just such as anyone will make when something vexatious takes place.

To whomsoever the voice belonged, it was neither Tom nor Jack, and the boy hesitated no longer. Down went the door with a dull bang, so that a regiment of men could not have forced it upward.

At the same time the youth dropped as heavily as he could on to the lid, as if to

hold it in place by his puny weight, but the sudden recollection of the ease with which the Wild Cat had tumbled him off caused him to smile even in his distress.

It should be said that, previous to the obstruction of the stranger, Benny had debated the plan of descending into the tunnel and crawling out. It would seem that, since the others had done this and left him alone, the most natural course was for him to follow them.

But several causes held him back. If obliged to creep unaided along the whole distance—which could not have been much less than a hundred feet—the task was almost beyond his strength. One limb was of no account, and he could make little use of his crutch. If he should be in the company of his brothers and give out, they would find some way of helping him through.

Then he was expected to wait there for their return, and any attempt on his part would upset their arrangements. It was such considerations as these that held the boy where he was, when strongly disposed to help himself.

He now stretched at full length on the floor, with his ear against the door that he had just closed and fastened, knowing he would soon hear from the party below. Hear he did, and that right soon.

The individual was groping through darkness as utter as that which afflicted ancient Egypt. Guided thus by the sense of feeling alone, he soon found he was at the end of the passage through which he had worked his way from the river. The lad heard him mutter again, and could imagine him slowly rising to the upright posture, still led by what his hands told him, until they came in contact with the door that barred further progress.

This time Benny was the one to open the conversation.

"Who is my brother?" he called, with his mouth to the slight crevice.

"Huh! Oneida—huh! he come."

Manifestly this gentleman possessed less knowledge of the English language than some of his brother warriors. Accordingly the lad accommodated him by adopting his tongue.

"What does my brother want?"

"He comes for his brother who walks like the papoose."

"He can't have him."

"He have other brothers—they want him—they sent warrior for him—let him not wait."

"Why does my brother come under the ground? Why does he not come to the door in front?"

"Iron Heart sent him here, for his pale-face brother will not open the door to him."

"He will open it sooner than this one. Oneida, go back to Iron Heart. If the pale-faces are with the Oneidas, and you will bring them to the door in front, then I will walk out and join them."

The Indian, having toiled so far underground, was desirous of escaping the return, and did his best to persuade the lad to admit him into the cabin, making all manner of promises and threats; but he soon realized it was in vain, and took himself away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT BEFELL JACK.

IT must have cost old Rupert McGurchen a world of labour to excavate the tunnel leading from the margin of the Catsuga to a point directly under his house; but you know that continual dropping wears away stones, and a man can do almost anything if he has time.

That singular character, having gone into the wilderness long before other settlers went thither, could not fail to know the great risk he ran from the red men, on whose friendship it was never safe to depend. After building his hut in the manner described, he set to work on the tunnel, keeping at work on it until the engineering was finished.

In the first place it was nearly a hundred feet in length, and followed a mathematically straight line to the edge of the river. This

involved extra work, for he wrought at so short a distance below the surface of the ground that many roots were encountered, and in several instances he was obliged to remove stones of considerable size; but the hermit found pleasure in the task, for there was no lack of time, and he persevered, as I have said, to the end.

The passage was about two feet wide and three feet high. These dimensions made it most uncomfortable for a man to walk through, since he was forced to crouch too low, and such persons always found it easier to crawl on their hands and knees.

The appearance of the Wild Cat's garments when he entered the hut showed that such had been his course, and as he came he went.

The Mohawk, realizing his mistake in exposing himself at the window of the hut, could not avoid some misgivings of the result when he should rejoin the Oneidas on the outside. He crept steadily along the tunnel until he once more caught the light of the fading afternoon over the surface of the Catsuga.

At the entrance he halted and listened.

Nothing was heard, and he crept a little further. Once more he stopped, with head and shoulders so far out that another movement would take him too far to withdraw.

The outlook appeared to be all he could ask, and he drew himself further until free of the tunnel. He was still under the bank, where the undergrowth gave partial shelter, and he paused until he could remove most of the soil from his clothing, which, like that of the average Indian, was never notable for its cleanliness.

Fortunately, at this season of the year the earth was comparatively dry, and he readily brushed it off. In the spring, or when the water flowed into the lower part of the passage, it must have been impossible, or at least very disagreeable, to enter the cabin by that route.

Some fifty yards below the opening the Mohawk thought it safe to take to higher ground. He found that as yet his presence in the neighborhood had not been noticed by the rest, and he was therefore confident of being safe, provided Black Buffalo, the Oneida,

had not recognized him in that single momentary glimpse of his face.

Trouble was gathering for the Mohawk, though of a different nature from what he suspected.

You will remember that the next gentleman to follow the Wild Cat along the tunnel was Jack Morris, who looked upon himself as a sort of advanced skirmisher, feeling the way for his brothers.

He could not avoid a certain wondering admiration at the achievement of old Rupert in providing himself with this means of escape, for, as I have already explained, it had been finished with a skill that could hardly be surpassed.

Enough light was in the sky to reveal the gleam of the water quite plainly before Jack reached it. Of course he halted at the opening, his intention being to avoid all needless risk.

It seemed to him, however, that he ought to learn a little more before going back to his brothers; and, to do that, it was necessary to take a glance up and down the shore upon

which the young fugitives would have to emerge in the event of their escape. Since the latter was not to be attempted until after dark, you will see the need of making sure of their footsteps.

There really was no need why Jack should not learn what he wanted to know, without special danger, though his heart beat a little faster when he found himself at last actually outside of the tunnel.

Eye and ear failed to apprise him of the proximity of enemies; and, believing he had done all that was prudent, he began working his way back to the opening.

He had left it for a distance of twenty feet, but, instead of going down stream as the Wild Cat did, he took the opposite course, and was in the act of turning about when he received a shock that checked him at once.

He had halted midway between the tunnel and the body of a man extended on the ground. Jack's first thought was that it was an Indian who had already discovered him, but a closer scrutiny showed the individual to be old Rupert, who was dead.

It was the custom of this strange character to dress after the fashion of the Iroquois, probably the more clearly to signify he had cast aside all affiliation with his own race. At a distance he was apt to be taken for an Indian, for his complexion was swarthy and his face clean shaven.

But as he lay, his countenance was turned towards the startled Jack; and, dim as was the light, the lad recognized him. He could not be asleep, for he was too frightfully pale, and there was something in the position itself which told the awful truth.

Jack could not resist the temptation to creep to the body for a closer look.

The gun and knife were missing. A mark in the upper side, beneath the arm, told where the weapon had been driven, but the body itself had suffered no further indignity. The long, matted hair still protected the crown, as it had done for years, without any other head-gear, and the clothing was uninjured except in the single spot where the cruel blade had pierced it.

The career of the strange character was

ended. The secret locked in his breast remained locked there still. Sorrow, grief and suffering had marked him for their own; but the end had come at last, and let us hope that he entered the blessed country where all tears are wiped away and the stricken heart finds rest, peace and happiness.

The awed Jack suspected the truth. Despite the pains with which old Rupert had cultivated the good will of the Iroquois, something had become known to them which threw suspicion on him. In some way they may have learned of the hint dropped in time to save the settler and family that had been marked. Then, at the critical moment, the three youths, whom the Indians were trying to secure, had fled to his home for refuge. Not only that, but they had entered and were able to hold their assailants at bay.

Even while accusing him, the red men must have seen the injustice of doing so; but that mattered little when their minds were at such an inflamed point. No protests of the wretch could avail, and so he died.

It took but a few minutes for Jack to form

his theory of what he saw. It gave him a vivid idea of the ferocity of the Leings that were seeking the ruin of himself and brothers. He resolved to return to them at once, and fight to the bitter end before thinking of surrender.

But he found his way barred. During the brief moments spent in surveying the remains of old Rupert, two Oneidas had appeared from somewhere, and were standing between him and the opening to the tunnel. A second glance seemed to show they had not yet observed him, though they were likely to do so at any moment.

Jack was in the act of rising to his feet, when he learned his danger. He instantly sank down again, hopeful that the Indians would move off; but they appeared to be interested in some matter, for they kept talking and gesticulating as though forgetful of everything else.

"I have got to keep clear of that spot until they get out of the way," was the natural conclusion of the youth; "and it may be I won't get the chance to go back to Tom and Benny."

Never did one long more ardently for night. It seemed to Jack that darkness never would come, though a while before he was sure it was at hand.

By and by, to his dismay, he observed that both warriors, while talking and gesticulating, were looking directly at him. Then the truth broke upon the lad. They saw him at first, and were simply toying with him.

"But I haven't surrendered yet," he muttered, springing to his feet and facing in the opposite direction, intending to run and fight as long as there was a spark of hope; but before he could make a start he was confronted by three other Oneidas, against whom, in his haste, he almost precipitated himself.

Jack Morris was entrapped, and seeing that escape was impossible, he submitted, for what else could he do?

CHAPTER XXV.

A DARK OUTLOOK.

DESPERATE as was his situation, Jack was on the point more than once of making a dash through the woods, or, clubbing his rifle and backing against the nearest tree, fighting it out to the death.

There could have been but one issue to such a struggle, but the plucky lad would not have hesitated to begin it had he not seen that the Oneidas intended to make him prisoner instead of putting him to death on the spot.

While there was life there was hope, and so long as he remained unharmed so long could he plan for safety while waiting the interference of friends.

Rather curiously, the two Iroquois who were talking so earnestly continued their conversation as though no interruption had taken place. They did not approach Jack, seemingly satisfied to let others assume charge of him.

The lad looked earnestly into the faces of the trio, hoping to recognize one of them, but all were strangers. They were painted and armed like the rest of the Indians, and he who took upon himself the part of leader in this interesting episode extended his hand for the rifle of the lad.

It was with a sharp pang that the youth surrendered the weapon, worth more to him than any prize within the gift of man. It was worse than useless to resist, and he passed over the gun with the best grace at his command.

The Oneidas laid no hands on the youth, but scrutinized his face with curious intentness, as though uncertain of his identity. They muttered to each other in their own tongue, none of them being able to speak a word of English, and finally the one who held his rifle motioned for him to walk in a certain direction among the trees. Jack obeyed, for he would have been foolish to refuse, but he made sure his knife was within instant reach.

"I can't imagine anything but the one end to this," he said to himself, "but it may be

they intend to delay business until Tom and Benny are brought in. Poor fellows! What will they think of my absence?"

The youth had not walked far when a smoke among the trees told him he was approaching a fire.

Before the warriors around the blaze observed the party with the prisoner, the latter noted several things.

There were less than a dozen Indians about the fire, and it was evident that some question had produced a profound agitation among them. There was much talking and gesture, the voices showing, too, that several of the party were angry.

The first warrior upon whom the eyes of Jack rested was his old friend the Wild Cat, who seemed to be holding an angry discussion with all the rest. His fiercest accuser was the vagrant Pete, whose bead-like eyes were aflame with fury, as he swung his arms in the face of the Mohawk.

"It must be that the Wild Cat is denying the charge that he was inside the hut," thought Jack, "and the rest are insisting

upon it. He has the worst end of the argument, because one of them saw him."

Jack, however, was wrong in his theory as to the cause of the excitement.

The argument was at its height when the speakers observed the three Oneidas, who came forward with their prisoner. Instantly the disputing ceased, and every eye was fixed upon the handsome white youth, whose conduct was brave, but without the defiance that often marks the demeanor of persons in his unfortunate situation.

Among the spectators there were none who appeared more astonished than the Wild Cat. He looked as if he had never before viewed so strange a scene.

Jack was too prudent and too grateful for what the Mohawk had already done to compromise him. He merely glanced at the warrior, as he did at the other members of the party.

"Eh, you come!" exclaimed Pete, turning his ugly, glowering face upon him; "kill you!"

And drawing his hunting-knife he strode

toward the youth, as if to carry out his threat. The lad recoiled a step, with his hand on his own weapon, and looked him in the eye.

"Strike if you want to, but I shall strike, too!"

The vagrant would have made the assault then and there, for he dared not shrink in the presence of his comrades. The result would have been sad had not the Mohawk stepped between the two and said, in a low, determined voice:

"Wait till Iron Heart comes; he shall do as he pleases."

The enraged warrior turned on the Wild Cat as if to assail him, but there was that in the flashing eye and fearless poise that restrained his fury. Muttering something in his own tongue, he fell back, repeating the charge against the Wild Cat that had already been uttered so often, and as often been denied by the accused.

This charge, it may as well be stated, was that the Mohawk had defeated the pet scheme of Iron Heart by apprising the threatened settlers of the attack arranged to be made

upon the smaller settlement. Nothing was said about the Wild Cat having visited old Rupert's hut, within which he was seen by one of the party; but that visit had brought about a most unfortunate complication for him.

You have been told that he was under surveillance by his comrades, who distrusted him; but, despite their watchfulness, he disappeared from sight during the afternoon, returning just before nightfall.

When questioned as to his whereabouts, he replied that, having got tired of lounging about the old Council Ground, he had gone on a stroll through the woods for no other purpose than his personal comfort.

It so happened that this was the worst answer he could have made, for one of the Oneida scouts, having been down the Catsuga to reconnoitre, had come back only a short time before with the tidings that the people at the smaller settlement had unquestionably received warning, for they were so fully prepared for attack that it would be useless to make it.

Nothing could have been more exasperating, for, as will be seen, this, if true, disarranged the whole plan of Iron Heart's campaign. The furious chieftain would not believe it until convinced by his own eyes. He set out in great haste to learn the truth, the distance being so short that he promised to return early in the evening. He had hardly set out when he met old Rupert returning in a bewildered way to his hut. Convinced that the hermit was not what he pretended, the infuriated war chief smote him to the earth with the suddenness of the thunderbolt, and then plunged savagely into the wilderness.

He had arranged that the Oneidas should thread their way through the forest at midnight, gathering silently around the doomed settlement and awaiting the hour to strike the fatal blow. The main body were to station themselves between the settlements, where any force sent out by General Greenfield could be ambushed, or at least assailed with an impetuosity that gave promise of success to the red men.

Suspicion was centred upon the Wild Cat

at once. Though it was known that one of the white scouts had been hovering in the vicinity the previous night, it was not believed possible for him to penetrate the real designs of Iron Heart.

The Mohawk knew them, and the distrust of him was natural.

It was during the absence of the war chief, and when the Oneidas were hotly discussing the matter, that the Wild Cat reappeared with the story of his jaunt through the woods. He had been away long enough to make the journey to and from the smaller settlement, and his explanation confirmed the suspicion of the Oneidas.

The Mohawk vehemently denied the charge, but he dared not give the truthful explanation of his whereabouts during most of the afternoon.

That would have involved him in trouble almost as deep, for how could he deny the accusation of having acted in the interest of the boys, even if he had done nothing to warn the pioneers further away?

The fact that the Wild Cat was not truth-

fully charged convinced him that Black Buffalo either failed to recognize him or for some reason was keeping the secret to himself. That warrior was not among the group around the fire, nor had he seen him since his return. He was puzzled over this, but dared not make inquiry.

From what has been told, you will observe that, to put it mildly, the situation was strained. Iron Heart was sure to come back soon, and there could be little doubt that his report would confirm that of the Oneida. In his flaming wrath his punishment of the traitor would be swift as terrible.

It was at this juncture that the group around the camp fire was startled by the report of a rifle near at hand. Instantly several warriors dashed off to learn the cause, and speedily returned with strange news.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE INTERFERENCE.

THEY had already lost one of their number the night before, besides the wounding of another by the besieged in the hut, and now a third had succumbed. The indications were that he had come unexpectedly in collision with the same white scout that played the mischief the preceding night. The latter, as he would express it to-day, got the drop on him, and the logical sequence followed.

This was annoying, but perhaps you may imagine the emotions of the Wild Cat when he learned that the Oneida that had fallen was Black Buffalo.

The fact that one of the boys within old Rupert's house had been captured fifty yards away was not without its lesson to the besieging Oneidas.

The odd structure was under such close sur-

veillance that he could no more have left the building by the main door undetected than he could have taken wings and flown to the clouds. The inference, therefore, was inevitable: there was underground communication to the hut.

The two that were first to observe Jack Morris saw that they had only to wait where they were to effect some interesting discoveries. They therefore sat down among the undergrowth, where they were securely concealed, and awaited events.

It would have been difficult, with the clue in their possession, to find the opening to the tunnel, which could not be far off; but they decided to wait under the belief that more ripe fruit would soon fall into their laps.

They were not disappointed. It was no more than fairly dark when they became aware that something or some one was stirring near them. The gloom was deep, but as if the stranger meant to lighten their task, he moved toward the spot where they were crouching upon the ground.

You need hardly be told that the newcomer

was Tom Morris. His anxiety about his brother led him to do what he would not have done at any other time. Hearing and seeing nothing near the opening, he ventured out to learn what had become of the missing Jack.

He had not left the margin of the river, when he almost stumbled over the Oneidas, who seized and disarmed him before he could think of resistance.

It was too bad, but all the advantage secured by the cunningly-built tunnel of old Rupert was lost. Had the boys stayed within the hut until night was fully come there is little doubt that they could have left without discovery, and in the darkness reached General Greenfield's headquarters in safety. It had all come about through the curiosity of Jack Morris. Take warning, boys.

Having located the outlet of the tunnel so closely, one of the Oneidas decided to investigate. He therefore turned over the captive to his companion, and began groping along the bushes near the spot where the last captive had shown himself.

He hit it the first time, and, hardly repressing a chuckle, entered the passage and began groping his way toward the hut. What followed has already been told you.

Ten minutes later Tom joined his brother at the camp fire, and the meeting, as you may judge, was a sad one. The Oneidas were so busy just then discussing the death of Black Buffalo, which was generally attributed to the right cause, that Tom and Jack ventured to exchange a few words. Having traded experiences, the latter said :

"If Benny knew what had taken place he would walk right out and give himself up."

"Of course; how the poor fellow will be distressed as the minutes go by and neither of us returns!"

"It won't take him long, however, to suspect the truth!"

"The Indians must know it already, for in what other way can they account for our presence here?"

"Of course, and some of them will start back over the route we came to enter the cabin as the Mohawk did."

Jack lowered his voice as he uttered the last words, fearful that they might be understood by their captors.

"They won't have as good luck as he in entering," said Tom, "for Benny is listening so closely that he will detect them in time to secure the trapdoor."

You will admit that Tom's estimate of his brother's sagacity was justified by what really took place.

"It must be that Ouden is near," said Jack, who had caught enough from the exclamations of the Oneidas to understand that one of their number had been overtaken by sudden death.

"I don't see what good he is doing us by shooting redskins," replied Tom.

"I don't suppose he had any thought of doing us good when he fired off his gun the last time; he was caught, so that he had to do something for himself."

"That may be, but it isn't adding anything to the good nature of these people."

"I never knew that they were blessed with good nature, but they are so mad that they

can't get any madder, so I don't see that it makes any difference one way or the other."

"Did you say Iron Heart is absent?" inquired Tom.

"Yes. I understand enough of the wrangle to get an idea of what they are jawing about. The Wild Cat has been charged with telling General Greenfield that the combined forces mean to attack the blockhouse to-night, and the Wild Cat has not done much since I've been here but deny it. Iron Heart set out to learn for himself whether General Greenfield has been notified."

"What does it matter, for ten times Iron Heart's force couldn't capture the blockhouse."

From either of these remarks you will perceive that neither of the brothers had struck the exact truth. Had they known that it was the smaller settlement that had been selected for the attack their views would have been modified.

"I am afraid it is going hard with us," added Tom, a minute later, after a survey of the scowling faces around him.

"Well, we must do as Benny has so often told us—trust in God and be prepared for what comes. I suppose he might as well be with us as to be alone in the hut, for there is no way of his escaping the Indians for long."

It was only a short time after this that the Oneida who had made the trip to and from the underground railroad joined the group with his astonishing story.

When it became known that the sole garrison of the fort which held the whole force of Indians at bay was a single boy, and he a cripple, without any weapon, the sensations of the painted warriors must have been peculiar, to say the least.

The statement of the Oneida that the lame one had promised to open the front door as soon as he learned of a certainty that his brothers were captives led to the step that was to end the siege at once.

Two of the Indians, neither being the Wild Cat nor Pete, motioned to Jack to accompany them to the hut. Both boys suspected the purpose of their captors, and Tom said:

"Go, Jack; it can't be helped."

"Of course not," replied the other, walking to the door, which was reached the next minute.

Willing to do his part, Jack knocked and called out:

"Halloo, are you there?"

"Yes," was the instant reply; "I know where you are, but what has become of Tom?"

"I am sorry to say he is with me."

"All right," was the cheery response; "I will be with you, too, in a minute."

The words were hardly uttered when the heavy door swung inward and the lame lad hobbled out.

The camp fire was burning so near that enough of its light reached the spot for the brothers to see each other dimly.

"Good evening," said Benny, saluting the amazed warriors, and then extending his hand to Jack, who threw his arms around his neck and burst into tears.

"It's all my fault," he said in a choking voice; "if I had stayed with you this never would have happened."

"There, there," was the soothing reply,

"don't take it to heart ; it's all right. God is with us yet."

The warriors did not stir nor speak. The scene was so unique that they were speechless for the moment. Benny continued his comforting words to his big brother, who quickly rallied from his grief and said :

"Lean on me, and let us go back to Tom."

The lame one did not need the help, but he ran his arm through that of his brother, who walked slowly at his side, accommodating his gait to the limping steps.

Tom deemed it best to keep his place by the fire, where, like the Oneidas, he surveyed Jack and Benny as they came forward, with the escort walking close behind them.

"How do you do, brothers ?" saluted Benny, with as pleasant a smile as if he were greeting his parents. There was one in that party of red men who must have been inspired of Satan. It was Pete, the vagrant, who had sat at the Morris table many times, and had received kindnesses innumerable from the family.

Determined to force the distasteful situation to an issue, he stepped back so as to stand be-

hind his companions, but within the illumination of the fire. His hand was already on his tomahawk, which he drew from his girdle unnoticed by anyone, since the attention of all was centered on the youths that had become captives in such a singular manner.

He resolved to bury the glittering weapon in the brain of the helpless lad, and then to fall upon his brothers in turn.

Carefully drawing back the hatchet, he raised it aloft, and poised himself for the fearful throw.

But before it could leave his hand, a sound like the hissing of a serpent broke the stillness, there was a flash as if from lightning, and the miscreant sank backwards to the earth, his skull cloven in twain by an implement similar to his own.

Ere the group realized what had taken place, Iron Heart, his countenance ablaze with fury, strode into the light and confronted the Oneidas, who saw the next instant that it was their famous war chief who had interposed to save the captives from one of the most cruel deaths that can be conceived.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JUDGE AND WITNESS.

NO imagination can exaggerate the wrath that raged in the breast of Iron Heart, chief of the Iroquois.

He had made the journey through the forest to the smaller settlement, which he confidently expected to destroy before the rising of the morrow's sun, and his eyes told him the pioneers had been warned of their danger and were so fully prepared that they were absolutely safe.

He set out on his return, eager to visit fearful punishment on the traitor.

But who was he?

There is away down in every heart a sense of justice which may be smothered for the time, but can never be wholly extinguished; and, though the chief believed the guilty one was the Mohawk known as the Wild Cat, there lingered enough doubt in his mind to

make him desirous of satisfying himself before striking the fatal blow.

He had long suspected old Rupert of baffling his schemes, but he was out of the way, and the entire truth could never be learned so far as it affected him.

As I have shown, circumstances were strongly against the Mohawk. He had been out of sight of all the warriors long enough to make a flying visit to the settlement and apprise the white men of their peril. Unless he could give satisfactory proof of his whereabouts for that period he should die the death that all such deserved.

Iron Heart was in this state of tempestuous rage when he drew near his own camp fire and observed the lads who had defied his warriors so long. The end had come, so far as concerned them, and they were prisoners and at the disposal of himself.

The chieftain was furious enough to visit vengeance upon all three, and there is no surety that he would not have done so the next moment, but a strange revulsion of hatred took place when he observed the treacherous

Pete poisoning himself for a throw of his tomahawk at the cripple, who at that moment was smiling and greeting the glowering Oneidas, all unconscious of his danger.

There was something so horrifying in the act that the Seneca's tornado of anger instantly concentrated on the wretch, and you have been told what followed.

The aspect of Iron Heart's face was so terrible, when he halted in the full glare of the firelight, that not a warrior dared speak through fear of drawing the lightning upon his own head.

But there was one who shared not this fear.

Benny Morris did that which the bravest Oneida shrank from doing. Doffing his hat with his left hand, as if in the presence of one whom he held in high reverence, he limped forward a couple of steps and extended his hand.

"I greet my brother, the great chief of the Iroquois," he said, in as excellent Seneca as the chieftain himself could have used.

The savage looked down at him without speaking. He did not stir nor notice the out-

stretched hand. Tom and Jack trembled, believing the infuriated chieftain would finish the crime that the vagrant had been checked in committing. They would have prayed their brother to withdraw, but were afraid to speak.

Benny showed no fear. He stood with his hat still in his left hand, his right extended, and his smiling face looking up at the frightful visage before him.

"Has Iron Heart forgotten Benny Morris?" he asked in his sweet, musical voice.

The breast of the chieftain heaved. His eyes blazed as he glowered down upon the beautiful countenance; then something like a ray of light seemed to chase away the horrible glare, and the hand which had just driven the tomahawk with such awful force reached out and grasped the small palm. The chief did not speak, but the expression of his face softened, and all saw that he gave the imprisoned hand a pressure.

The act dissolved the spell which seemed to hold the spectators breathless. More than one sigh was heard, as though a great pressure had been lifted from their breasts.

It seemed to Tom and Jack, who were watching the strange scene, that there was little abatement in the passion which flamed from the countenance of Iron Heart; but Benny, who looked straight up in the black eyes, saw what was hidden from the others; the one vulnerable spot in the furious chieftain's heart had been touched and melted by Him who alone can subdue the tiger and savage.

The sachem did not speak for a minute or so, until the silence was becoming oppressive. Then Benny said, with inimitable tact:

"The mighty chieftain of the Iroquois is the friend of Benny, the paleface, who is not strong enough to carry a gun and fire it; when he is in danger then will Iron Heart take care of him as the Great Spirit takes care of both."

The Seneca leader held his lips closed more tightly than before, but there was a slight inclination of the head.

Could it be that that terrible man was so moved that he dared not trust his voice?

None of the spectators spoke or offered to

sit down ; such an act was out of keeping with the time and place.

But Iron Heart had what he conceived to be a stern duty before him. He raised his face and glanced around the circle of Onesidas. His eyes rested on the Mohawk known as the Wild Cat.

Instantly the brows of the chieftain became a thunder-cloud again. The sunlight was obscured and the tempest raged.

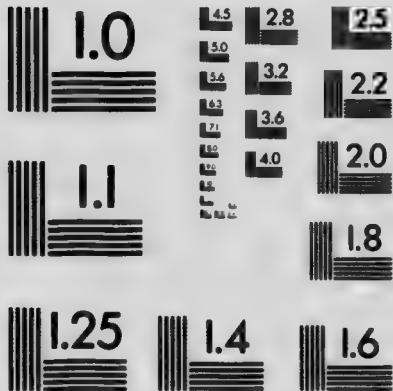
The Mohawk met the fierce gaze of the chieftain with a look of fearful calmness, which, it is safe to say, no other warrior in that company could have equaled.

"Mohawk," said Iron Heart, in a voice as low and ominous as the muttering in the midnight sky, "Iron Heart ran all the way to the settlements of the palefaces that he might see with his eyes whether Leaping Horse told him the truth. He found he spoke with a single tongue, and it was as he said: some one has whispered in the ears of the palefaces that Iron Heart was gathering his warriors, and would hurl them against the cabins as the Great Spirit hurls the fire from the skies



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when he is angry. The palefaces have run into their cabins and fastened the doors; they are afraid of Iron Heart, and he and his warriors cannot reach them with their rifles and tomahawks and knives."

The chieftain ceased speaking, as if inviting the Wild Cat to reply, but the warrior answered not and continued to look him as calmly in the face as before.

"Mohawk, some one has whispered in the ears of the palefaces, and made them flee into their cabins and close their doors. Who spoke the warning words?"

"The Wild Cat speaks with a single tongue," was the reply, in which there was not a trace of agitation; "he cannot tell the mighty chief who whispered in the ears of the palefaces."

"Was it not the Wild Cat?"

"The Mohawk never told the white men that the red men were making ready to raise their arms to strike."

Possibly none of the Oneidas nor Iron Heart himself noticed the point of this reply, but it struck each of the brothers. The Mo-

hawk had not warned any men of their peril, but he would not deny that he had done something in that line with three parties not yet arrived at man's estate.

Some persons have strange ideas of truth and falsehood. The Wild Cat had played his part in prevarication, and, only a short time before, falsified by saying that he had spent most of the afternoon strolling through the woods, instead of confessing that he was in the hut of old Rupert with the brothers, and yet he was as much justified in deceiving in the one case as the other.

"Mohawk, listen. The Wild Cat wandered by himself when the sun was high in the heavens, and none of the brothers saw him until the sun was low. Why did he go away?"

"His heart was heavy; he wandered to the side of the river and sat down on the bank."

"Did he stay there?"

"For a time."

"Where else did his footsteps lead him?"

"When the sun sunk low in the sky he came to his brothers the Oneidas."

This was dodging the question, but the Mohawk could not divert his stern examiner from the line to which he was hewing so amazingly close. The chieftain saw the joint in his armor and pierced it at once.

"The Wild Cat is now speaking with the double tongue of the palefaces. Where else did he wander?"

This was put in the same key, but all noted the deep rumbling of the voice, and not one of the listeners failed to note the threatening action of the chieftain, who rested his hand on his knife at his waist and took a half step forward.

It was a puzzle to Benny Morris and his brothers why the Wild Cat should wish to deceive his master. How could he injure himself by telling of his visit to the cabin? Could it be out of consideration for the boys? Could the lame one have been assured that such was the fact, he was still unable to see the reason for his silence, and he would have told the truth himself.

Probably the Wild Cat awoke to his mistake, for now, when the question was pressed home, he out with it.

"He was in the cabin of the paleface who died by the hand of Iron Heart."

Benny saw his chance.

"The Wild Cat speaks the truth," said he.

"He came by the passage under the ground. He was there with us, and one of Iron Heart's warriors saw him in the cabin."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IRON HEART AND HIS WARRIORS.

THIS announcement, which was made in the Seneca tongue, was surprising news to all. Even Iron Heart had not yet learned that two of the captives left the fort by the underground trail, and had literally walked into the custody of the Oneidas.

But the savage leader believed in one person. Turning his head, he again looked into the face of Benny Morris and invited him to explain the meaning of what he had heard.

The lad did so as succinctly as he knew how, with the gaze of Iron Heart never once removed from his countenance. The others saw no other sign of special interest on his part, but the little fellow knew that the chief-tain's heart was seldom stirred more than it was by the story to which he then listened.

When it was finished, Iron Heart gazed once more upon the Mohawk. He did not

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speak, but words could not have asked more plainly why he had kept back the truth after witnessing the late act of friendship on the part of the leader himself.

Could he think Iron Heart would condemn him more for serving the cripple and his brothers than he would for hurrying through the wilderness to defeat a favorite campaign of the chieftain?

It may be that a sense of absurdity broke upon the Mohawk, for he held his peace.

Iron Heart did not question the truthfulness of Benny Morris's story, but he looked around for Black Buffalo, that he might hear from his lips that he saw the face of the Wild Cat within the cabin.

But this particular testimony was beyond reach. Orris Ouden, as may be said, had ruled it out of court. Iron Heart, however, had heard enough. The Mohawk was cleared of suspicion, and he told him so. After such a vindication none other dare accuse him. But he had trod fearfully nigh unto death, and the Wild Cat knew it.

It was inevitable that the war chief of the

Iroquois should be chagrined by the defeat of the plan of attack on which he had placed such high hopes, and which, as I have shown, must have been overwhelmingly successful but for the timely warning that reached the imperilled settlers.

But the failure of one plan did not mean the failure of the struggle into which he had entered heart and soul. There were other settlements and other means of delivering the blows which he meant not to stay until the hunting grounds of his people were cleared of the paleface invaders.

The question as to who had carried the all-important message to the pioneers was not yet answered. Iron Heart was gradually nearing the end. Finally he asked Benny some particulars as to the movements of Ouden, the scout, the previous night.

The lad gave them truthfully, and then put the question whether the hunter understood the Seneca tongue. Benny replied that it was as intelligible to him as his own.

That cleared it up; Orris Ouden had been very, very near the old Council Ground

when Iron Heart made his fiery harangue to the warriors and disclosed his plans. You will recall that Ouden extinguished one of the returning Oneida scouts within a short distance of the camp, so there could be no doubt of his presence at the exact time he ought to have been, or, as the chief felt, he ought not to have been there.

Iron Heart directed one of the Oneidas to go to the upper encampments and notify the Iroquois gathered there that no movement would be undertaken that night, and that they were to descend the river to the old Council Ground and there await his orders. Then he made his preparations.

The weather remained clear and moderately cool, so that the warmth of the fire was grateful. Several of the Oneidas scattered into the woods in search of game, which was so abundant during the early days in that section that their search was sure to be short and successful.

The brothers felt that all present danger was over, and they did not hesitate to sit down on the ground and talk as freely as

they had done the night before in old Rupert's cabin.

"How strangely everything has come out," said Jack, in an awed voice; "but there are some things about this business that I do not understand."

"There are a good many that beat me," added Tom.

"I don't wonder," remarked the oracle of the family, "for they look like a direct intervention of Providence, in which you know, brothers, I have always believed."

"Suppose we had given ourselves up to the Indians in the first place," said Jack, "would we have been treated like this?"

"I doubt it, if so, why would they have hunted us so closely, only to let us go again? The whole thing was done by Iron Heart."

"But he has been at the head of the business from the first."

"And you will remember," reminded Benny, with a smile, "that I half believed he would not forget his former regard for me, though I didn't count too much on it, and was

distrustful of Pete, who proved to be the worst wretch I ever knew."

"There is no doubt of Iron Heart's affection for you, Benny; I never saw anything equal to the scene when he took your hand after first refusing it. But proving that he holds such good will toward you doesn't make it certain that he is friendly to us. I don't believe he would have spared father or mother or Tom or me, had we been at the smaller settlement which it turns out he meant to attack."

"I am sure he would not, and probably not me."

"Why, then, should he do so now?"

The lame brother looked sorely troubled.

"I am sorry you asked the question, for the answer is one that distresses me more than I can tell. I will say, though, that I am hopeful of being the means of restraining any wrong he may think of doing you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOWN THE CATSUGA.

BENNY MORRIS saw that Jack and Tom had almost given up the last lingering hope that their lives might be spared by the Indians, and he endeavored to encourage them as much as possible. But he could say little to give them any confidence.

The lingering distrust which all felt of Iron Heart's intentions respecting the twins was deepened by his curious demeanour, followed so closely upon his violent act in behalf of the one who was halt.

While the hunters were absent in the woods the chieftain walked out in the gloom, not returning until one of the Oneidas appeared with the carcass of a deer, which was hastily though rudely dressed and broiled in large slices over the fire.

Then, when the leader came forth, he took

the first piece, and seating himself on a fallen tree where no one presumed to put himself beside him, he fell to eating in the same glum silence he had shown for the last half hour.

The boys said nothing, but Benny watched him closely. He was on the point of crossing over and saying something to him, but his good sense told him the chief was in a mood which would render such an act unwelcome, if not dangerous.

No one could say what thoughts were seething in that savage breast. Possibly the old Adam was striving with his better nature and might get the mastery. He may have felt that he showed an unmanly weakness in befriending the members of the race whom he hated with an intensity beyond that of the ordinary red man. It would not have been out of keeping with his instincts had he bounded to his feet and slain all three in quick succession. The American Indian is subject to such fearful outbursts, and there is no telling what the untamed savage will or will not do in unusual emergencies.

Suspecting the struggle that was going on,

Benny Morris put up a fervent supplication to the master of the human heart, begging him to guide the chief safely through the labyrinth of sin and temptation.

It was yet early in the evening, and the meal was hardly finished when Iron Heart abruptly rose from the tree on which he was seated and fixed his gaze with such burning intensity on Jack Morris that the hearts of the brothers stood still. During his absence the chief must have approached the body of Pete, for his tomahawk was at its place in his girdle, alongside his knife, and he held his formidable rifle in his right hand.

The scrutiny lasted but for a moment, when he beckoned to Jack to approach. The lad instantly rose from the ground and obeyed.

Before he reached him he made the same gesture to Tom and Benny in turn, and the next minute the three stood before him, like so many culprits in front of their teacher calling them to account for some misdeed.

Then Iron Heart said something to one of his warriors, who immediately advanced and handed to Jack and Tom each his rifle, while

the brothers waited in wonder for the next order.

Again, without speaking, Iron Heart commanded them to follow him, as he turned about and walked in the direction of the river near at hand.

It need not be said that the boys obeyed in the same silence that they received the command.

The long struggle that had been raging in the brain of the terrible chieftain was ended and his decision reached. It looked as if the good angel had triumphed, but even the wise Benny was not certain. He watched the Seneca closely, and was hopeful, but not altogether free from misgiving.

A dim, shadowy, awful fear haunted the lame one that Iron Heart meant to take him and his brothers by themselves and put them to death out of sight of the others. Having saved them in the presence of his warriors, the chief might be ashamed to destroy them under the eyes of those who had witnessed his swift vengeance.

But the probabilities were against this

theory. The tomahawking of the captives before the Oneidas would do much to wipe out the weakness he had shown in sparing them.

The strongest proof, however, was the surrender of the guns to the boys. When they were handed over by the fire, the owners glanced at the powder pans, and saw that they were full. Thus they were furnished with the most effective weapons for defence, and you need not be told how promptly they would use them the instant the necessity arose.

All was dark on the margin of the Cat-suga, but the sky was so clear, and the stars shone so brightly, that the movements of the whole party could be seen. The chieftain stooped and examined the interior of a large canoe lying against the bank. As he did so, glimpses of other boats were seen. The Oneidas must have several at command.

"Go in boat," said Iron Heart, speaking for the first time, and the lads obeyed without hesitation, Benny being first.

"Where shall I sit, Iron Heart?" he asked, leaning on his crutch in the middle of the canoe.

The chief pointed to the canoe prow.

"That suits me," replied the lad, "for I am used to sitting there. "Come on, Jack and Tom."

A gesture of the hand told them to place themselves at the stern, while Iron Heart took up the paddle and sat near the middle. In accordance with the rule he faced the front, thus placing his back toward the twins.

Observing this, Jack, who was nearest the stern, leaned forward and whispered in the ear of Tom :

"We've got him ; our guns are loaded."

Tom nodded by way of reply, and the hopes of the brothers rose higher than at any time since their capture.

Although Iron Heart was the mightiest warrior of the fierce Iroquois, there was a limit to his prowess. He might consider himself the equal of several palefaces in fair a combat, but if he should undertake to slay three boys, situated as they were around him, and with a couple armed and on the alert, he was sure to find the task beyond his power.

"I'll keep my eye on him," thought Tom ;

"if he means to paddle to some lonely place down the river and tomahawk us, it will be the last job he undertakes."

"I can tell what he intends to do in time to prevent it," said Jack to himself, following the same line of thought; "and the instant he stops paddling I'll raise my rifle, and it'll then depend on who's the quickest. I don't think it will be he."

But you will admit that this was taking a most unreasonable view of the situation. If such was the intention of Iron Heart, I am sure we would all lower our respect for him.

Benny had hardly taken his seat when one of his feet touched something in the bottom of the canoe, and he leaned over to learn what it was.

"Good!" he called out to his brothers; "I have found my Bible!"

It was indeed the precious book which lay unharmed at his feet.

"I wonder how it got there?" said Jack, sharing the delight of the happy fellow.

"It is Iron Heart's doing," replied Benny;

"it's just like him. The Great Spirit must love him."

The ardent tribute to the chieftain's kindness was understood by him, and must have kindled some appreciation on his part, though he did not speak. He had taken up the long paddle, and, dipping it first on one side of the craft and then on the other, sent it swiftly down the river. He veered to the middle of the stream, where he was clear from the overhanging shrubbery and gained the advantage of the more rapid current.

That canoe ride down the Cateuga was one no member of the party could forget during after life, for not only were the circumstances peculiar, but the time and surroundings were most impressive. The starlight was just strong enough to reveal the dark line of shore, while blank darkness was on every hand.

Turning his head after going a short way, Jack caught a momentary twinkle of the camp fire they were leaving, but it instantly vanished under the motion of the boat, and no sign of life met the eye in any direction.

The listening ear took no note of any sound

save that faint murmur which is always perceptible near a stretch of forest. None spoke, but all gave themselves to meditation, the kids not forgetting to keep their eye on Iron Heart, and not yet wholly free of misgiving concerning him.

No one could have looked at the chief without admiration. He was a specimen of the perfect American Indian—lithe, graceful, quick, and as alert as a panther. The motion of his arms in swaying the paddle on alternate sides of the canoe was as regular and as free from apparent labour as the working of delicate machinery. It looked, indeed, as if he merely dipped the implement without pressing it against the water, and but for the fact that the boys felt the impulse beneath them as regularly as the breathing of a sleeping person they would have believed he was merely toying with the blade.

"Yesterday we started alone in our boat," reflected Benny, "and had not gone far when we met Orris Ouden, who gave us great help. Little did we dream that the latter part of the voyage would be made with Iron Heart, who

is conspiring to massacre so many of our people. How strange that Tom or Jack or I should have had any distrust of him after he had slain Pete and grasped my hand before the Oneidas."

From this you will understand that every misgiving was at last removed from the mind of the lame boy. It was about the same with his brothers, though they did not relax their watchfulness of him who was held in such fear along the frontier.

Those iron arms could have driven the boat at double the speed, and continued it for hours without tiring; but the distance to the blockhouse was not far, the night was young, and there was no call for haste.

The course of the river was winding throughout its length, but the boys were familiar with every portion between their home and the settlements. They had been over it times without number, and, despite the darkness, were able to locate themselves whenever they glanced at the dark shore on either hand.

When they saw they were approaching the blockhouse, which stood at the upper portion

of the larger settlement, they were free of all suspicion of their escort. Had he meditated any wrong against them, it would have been revealed before this.

Jack, who had held the hammer of his rifle raised for most of the distance, softly lowered it again, and rested the weapon across the gunwale in front. Tom had not taken such extreme precautions, but he breathed freely now that certain peril no longer threatened. Benny had tamed the savage that was believed to be untamable, and, so far as he and his brothers were concerned, they had nothing to fear from the chieftain whose tomahawk had been buried in the brain of so many of his enemies.

Suddenly, while all were looking ahead, and the boat was sweeping around another bend, a point of light gleamed across the water on the northern shore. Then another and another, at varying distances apart, until fully a dozen shone like stars through the gloom.

"There is the settlement," said Benny, who had turned so as to look over his shoulder; "our journey is near its end."

"And it has been a pleasant one," added Jack, with a sigh that could not tell the unspeakable relief he felt at their deliverance from the perils by which they were environed a short time before.

"Yes; we can never thank Iron Heart enough," remarked Tom, stretching his limbs and yawning from the cramped posture he had borne so long; "he has been the best of friends."

Benny would not have uttered these words, for with his knowledge of the Seneca's nature, he knew the charge he was likely to resent the most angrily was that of being well disposed to the race that were driving him and his people from their hunting grounds.

True, he had proven himself the one friend in need, but you know there are some persons so oddly made up they cannot bear to be reminded of their good deeds. Strange that it is so, but none the less it is true.

Iron Heart headed the canoe for the shore at a point above the blockhouse and beyond sight of the pickets that were likely to be on duty, since it was known that the Iroquois had taken the warpath.

As the prow struck the bank the brothers stepped lightly out and turned to help Benny.

"Stay," said the chief; "he go wid Iron Heart."

The boys stood amazed at this, uncertain whether to give their assent or not; but the lame brother, retaining his seat, said:

"It is all right, boys; Iron Heart has some business with me; I am not afraid to trust myself with him, and I am sure you should not be."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COMPACT.

THE canoe of the Iroquois chieftain was not the only one that was stealing down the Catsuga on that cool autumn night. Only a short distance behind was a second, which moved as noiseless as a shadow, keeping close to the northern shore, and so graduating its speed to that of the one in advance that at no time did the distance between them vary more than a few yards.

Subtle, watchful and keen of sense as was the great Seneca, he had no suspicion that another boat was so near him, and the reason was that in the other boat sat as consummate a master of woodcraft as himself. The name of this individual was Orris Ouden.

You have not forgotten his anxiety for the safety of the lads, from whom he was separated the preceding night. You will recall

that, after delivering his important report to General Greenfield, notifying the pioneers at the lower settlement of their danger, and returning once more to the blockhouse, he set out to search for the brothers, for whom he felt the gravest alarm.

The good fortune that had marked the steps of the hunter up to this point seemed to leave him for a while. In the face of his skill in tracing the faintest footprints in the forest, he was unable to strike the track of his friends until nearly the close of the day, when he was dumfounded to discover the three in the hut of old Rupert, where it would seem he ought to have looked for them long before.

But as yet he did not dream of the underground passage. While manœuvring around the Oneidas, with the hope of gaining more accurate knowledge of the situation, he came in collision with Black Buffalo, who was prosecuting a scout for himself.

The collision proved disastrous to Black Buffalo.

Ouden deemed it best to draw off, as he expected a lively search to be made for him.

Finding the coast clear once more, he returned in time to witness the dramatic salutation between the Iroquois chieftain and Benny Morrix.

This was a revelation to the hunter, but it gave no hint of the means by which the larger boys had left the hut, where they held off the Oneidas so long. His natural thought was that Iron Heart had convinced the youths of his friendship, and they had voluntarily walked out and given themselves up.

The hunter let nothing escape him now. When the chieftain conducted the lads to the riverside, he cautiously followed, and was near enough to understand what they were doing. It was an easy matter to withdraw one of the canoes, and follow them as I have shown he did.

It was not strange that Ouden should have shared the misgivings of the boys, for no white man knew the ferocity of the chieftain better than he, and it was inconceivable that an emotion like friendship or gratitude should exist in his heart toward any Caucasian, unless it might be the lad that was halt.

There was something in the latter beyond his helplessness which proved winsome to the wildest nature; and since Iron Heart had shown a liking to Benny in the days of peace, it might be he was still disposed to make an exception of him in his crusade against the palefaces; but it was incredible that he should include his lusty brothers.

Had Iron Heart attempted the wholesale destruction of his guests in the boat, Ouden would have darted his canoe like a swallow to the spot, and, to put it mildly, there would have been lively times on that part of the river; but, as you know, nothing of the kind took place.

Jack and Tom, therefore, had no thought that their old friend was at their elbow, as they stood on the shore looking after the canoe from which they had just stepped, and which was bearing away Iron Heart and their brother.

The twins were not uneasy, for after their recent experience they could not doubt the love of the Iroquois for Benny.

"I wonder whether the chief is going to adopt him," said Tom with a gentle laugh.

"Being a king of the Iroquois, it may be he has a young princess picked out for Benny's bride, and he wants to take him home to inspect the dusky beauty."

"Benny is getting old enough to think about young ladies, but I don't believe he dreams of anything of that kind now. Then I'm afraid," added Tom, "that the Iroquois maidens wouldn't take kindly to one who cannot fire a gun and run like a deer."

"There is something about our brother," said Jack, more seriously, "which attracts the chief. What it is I cannot define, any more than I can tell why he charms everyone; it is the nature which God has given him. I wouldn't be surprised if he wanted Benny to go to his village and become his son."

"He may want him to do that some day, but not just now."

"And why not?"

"Iron Heart is too busy plotting his deviltry against the settlers to take any time with his family, where he would have to leave Benny. No, he wants him for something else."

"I'm hopeful the boy will get a chance to do some good by opening Iron Heart's eyes to the foolishness of fighting against our people."

"If there is such a chance you may be sure Benny will see and take advantage of it."

"Well, they are out of sight," remarked Jack, a minute later, "and we may as well go into the settlement for the night."

The brothers had taken a few steps when they were checked by a familiar call.

"Halloo, thar, younkens!"

It was Orris Ouden that walked out from the wood behind them and took the hand of each in turn. Glad were all to meet, and in a brief space the hunter had heard the whole story of his young friends.

"Whew!" he muttered, when they had finished; "and so there's an underground trail atween the river and old Rupert's hut! I never thought of that, though it won't do the old chap any more good, for he went under long ago."

"What do you suppose Iron Heart wants with Benny?"

"Don't know, but he's safe with him—you can depend on that. Howsumever, what's the use of standing here? It's gettin' late, and we may as well go up to the blockhouse, whar I see a light is shinin'. The Ginerall will be glad to see us, and thar are several things I want to talk over with him."

"We would rather go to Mr. Jenkins'," said Jack, "for we have often stayed there over night."

"All right," replied the hunter, walking with them to one of the substantial cabins, within which a light was shining.

Before reaching it they were challenged by a picket and compelled to make themselves known ere he would allow them to pass.

The boys bade their friend good-night, and, after giving Mr. Jenkins and his wife an account of their stirring experiences, they went to bed and speedily fell asleep.

Meanwhile Ouden was holding a conference with General Greenfield, who had been expecting him all the afternoon and evening, and was anxious for the meeting.

They sat alone in the apartment which the

officer used as his headquarters in the block-house. The garrison was on duty, and the space within the structure was so small that the two had to keep their voices at a low key to prevent their words being overheard.

"Well," said the General, after shaking hands with the brave man whom he held in high esteem, "you never did a better thing than when you gave the folks down the river notice that Iron Heart meant to attack them to-morrow at daylight. You found them so unprepared that had the attack been made not a soul would have been left; now they are secure without any help from me."

"Yes; Iron Heart is so disgusted that he doesn't mean to take his warriors near the place."

"How can you be sure of that?"

Ouden told what he had learned from boys. The chieftain himself had survived the small settlement that very day, after hearing that the pioneers were alarmed, and, fiery and brave as he was, he saw the folly of making an attack at the time.

"Better yet!" was the comment of General

Greenfield; "if the leader of the Iroquois was anyone but Iron Heart I would be sure the outlook would strike him so unfavorably that he would give over his designs against us. The settlement can never be safe so long as he is alive."

Nothing could exceed the impressiveness with which this sentiment was uttered, and the action of General Greenfield was peculiar. He was sitting at the opposite side of the table, and without stirring a muscle or uttering a word he looked at the scout who sat on the opposite side, gazing as fixedly upon his countenance.

The lips were silent, but the eyes spoke a language equally plain to both.

"I have funds from General Washington," finally said the officer, "and he tells me to expend them as I think best for the cause of American independence."

"How much is in this?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"In Continental currency, I s'pose."

"Every penny is yellow gold, and it shall be yours when Iron Heart can no longer hurl

his warriors against the settlements. What do you say?"

Orris Ouden extended his hand and warmly pressed that of the General, who smiled and nodded as he bade him good-night.

The compact was complete; the contract was signed, sealed and delivered.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PURSUING THE PURSUER.

I HAVE said that on the autumn night that Iron Heart paddled down the Catsuga a second canoe took the same course, following so closely that the occupant never lost track of the chieftain, though he handled his own craft with such skill that the wily Seneca never suspected that he was shadowed.

And on the same evening a third boat went over most of the course, a short way in the rear of Orris Ouden, the hunter, as if its single occupant was also watching him. The solitary individual, who swayed the long paddle with a skill equal to that of the other two, was the Mohawk known as the Wild Cat.

Some peculiar business must have led him to make this trip, for it was without the knowledge of his chief, whom he seemed so anxious to avoid that he kept further to the

rear of the white man than the latter did be hind Iron Heart.

Probably half the distance between the camp at the old Council Ground and the upper settlement was passed when Ouden was surprised to discover a boat following him.

His ear caught the faint ripple of a paddle, and he instantly ceased swinging his own, and, taking up his gun, waited for the stranger to approach near enough to risk a shot. He paused until he fell further behind Iron Heart than at any time on the way.

But the Wild Cat was too cunning to be caught. He knew of the white man in front, and avoided him by slowing his own speed. His plan did not contemplate a fight, though, under different circumstances, he would not have shrunk from the test.

The hunter bent his head, peered through the gloom behind him, and knew the next moment that his pursuer, if he be considered such, had also ceased paddling. It followed, therefore, that he suspected the tactics of the white man.

"I don't know you," muttered Ouden, taking up his paddle again, "but if it wasn't for this king varmint in front I'd mighty soon find out who you are. Just now I'm after bigger game, and I don't mean to be drawn aside by anyone else."

For several minutes the hunter gave his whole attention to Iron Heart's canoe, for just then he was afraid the grim chieftain meditated treachery to the boys whom he was taking down the river. The presence of the third boat, far to the rear, added to Ouden's misgiving, and he believed a desperate struggle probable.

But he could not forget the dusky scamp dogging him, and his sharp eyes strove to pierce the gloom to the rear oftener than they followed the shadowy craft in front.

The hunter swung his paddle so deliberately that between each impetus he gave the boat he held the blade suspended for several seconds in midair, with the drops falling at his feet.

It was during these brief intervals that he listened for the dip of the paddle which caused him no little disturbance.

Rarely did fail to hear it, for, though it would have been inaudible to untrained ears, the hunter read the meaning aright, and began to believe that if he avoided a fight with the chieftain in front, he was in for one with the warrior at the rear.

With all his acumen, Orris Ouden could not explain satisfactorily to himself the presence of the second Indian (for he was certain that he was not a white man) behind him.

The most probable theory, as it seemed to him, was that he was an ally, who, at a signal from his chief, was to dart forward with his boat and take part in slaying the boys. But, if such were the fact, the hunter could conjure up no reason for it.

Beside the unquestioned prowess of the Seneca, who would have scorned to ask help in disposing of three youths, one of whom was helpless, he was certainly under no compulsion to adopt such an inconvenient plan. If he wanted a companion at the right moment, why should he not take him in his own canoe, which would readily carry several more,

and thus have him at hand to prevent any possible miscarriage of his purpose?

However, although the hunter could not help speculating as to the cause of his pursuit, it was not necessary that at that time he should know the truth.

So extraordinary was Ouden's power of hearing that, without once seeing his pursuer, he kept accurate trace of him by the faint ripple of his paddle. You might think the Wild Cat did this purposely, but it was not so. He swung the implement with great care, and did not believe it was heard by the white man, though the action of the hunter told him his pursuit had become known to him.

Matters continued in this peculiar form until Iron Heart had approached within a mile of the blockhouse. It was at this juncture that Ouden, while holding his own oar suspended in midair, and listening with all his ears, became aware that the Indian had ceased paddling.

The hunter listened for some time, during which his canoe fell somewhat to the rear of Iron Heart, who advanced steadily; but the

sound came not, and driving his own boat forward with increased vigor to recover the lost ground, or rather water, he again listened for a few seconds.

No; the paddle of the strange Indian was motionless.

"He has stopped, sure enough," was the conclusion of the hunter; "maybe he means to run along shore and give me a shot from the wood."

Little probability of that, since he would have been sure to betray himself to the scout, who felt no fear of him.

At intervals he ceased his paddling, but he heard no more of his pursuer.

Then, as you have been told, the hunter ran ashore, so far to the rear of Iron Heart that the two were mutually invisible; stealing forward, he joined the boys just as they turned away to enter the settlement close at hand.

As I have said, Ouden was right in believing that for some cause his pursuer had landed, or at least ceased paddling. Previous to this, the hunter had concluded that Iron

Heart intended to put the boys ashore near the settlement. A great burden was thus lifted from his heart and he dismissed the other warrior from his thoughts.

Meanwhile the Wild Cat had pulled his boat far enough up the bank to hold it secure against being swept away by the current. He had chosen a spot familiar to him, for he had encamped there many a time while on hunting excursions of his own.

Like so many miles of the Catsuga, the bank was lined with dense wood and undergrowth, through which he was obliged to pick his way for several yards. It was his wish to keep near the river, and when he stopped he was not fifty feet from it.

He had selected a bluff, a rod in height, and from which a tiny stream of clear water wound into the current below, falling so gently as to cause scarcely a ripple.

A giant tree was surrounded by ashes, the remains of many former fires, more than one of which had been kindled by the Mohawk himself. A large, flat stone rose a couple of feet from the ground, while the surrounding

undergrowth shut out all wind that might have disturbed the campers.

A more pleasant place for forming a small camp could not exist. When I add that enough of the wood gathered on former occasions remained to keep a vigorous fire going several hours, you will agree that, since the Mohawk had decided to camp by himself, he had made a selection that could not be improved.

Such was his intention, and in less time than you would have supposed the fire was under way. The Wild Cat, like many of his people, carried his flint and steel, and he could start a flame more quickly than it takes many a lad to build the morning fire for his parents.

He waited till the blaze was burning strongly, when he threw on more wood and walked down to the river, where he had left his canoe. Entering this, he paddled out a short distance, and, looking up the bank, was able to see the light among the trees and undergrowth.

This must have been what he wished, for he returned to land, drew up his boat, and

then stood in the gloom, as if awaiting the appearance of some one.

Such was the fact; he had started the fire to attract the eye of Iron Heart, who, he knew, would soon be on his return from landing the boys near the settlement.

Looking out on the calm surface of the Catsuga, he saw nothing of the chief's boat, nor could he catch the sound of the paddle which would tell of his approach before the eye could discover him.

Convinced that he would not appear for some minutes, the Mohawk returned to the burning wood, stirred it up, threw on more fuel, and then came back once more to his position at the foot of the bluff.

Hark!

Yes; he heard the sound for which he was listening, and peering out in the darkness, discerned the shadowy outlines of a canoe ascending the stream.

The Mohawk did not stir for a minute or two, but never once removed his eyes from the object, which became more distinct each minute.

He was surprised to observe that instead of one person there were two, but he quickly identified the smaller one seated at the prow, and, emitting a low whistle, had the pleasure of seeing the craft head for the foot of the bluff where he was standing.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE BLUFF.

THERE was not one pang of misgiving on the part of little Benny Morris when he called good-by to Tom and Jack, and Iron Heart, with one powerful sweep of his paddle, sent the canoe skimming up the Catsuga.

What the purpose of the chieftain was in thus taking him for a time from his friends he could not conjecture, but he was willing to await the hour when this strange individual should choose to make it known.

The tender nature of the remarkable boy was impressed by the events of the last twenty-four hours. He and his brothers had been involved in perils from which at one time there had seemed no possible escape, and when even his hopeful nature was almost in despair; but behold! From them all they had been as safely delivered as were the Israelites from the hosts of Pharaoh.

Just a little thrill of pain touched him as he recalled that that loved home in which he had spent so many happy days was now only a heap of ashes and ruins; but when he reflected that his adored parents, and his big, noble brothers had not had a hair of their heads harmed, his heart swelled with a gratitude that made it hard to restrain himself from shouting for joy.

"God is opening the way for me to do good to some one," was his belief, "and whoever it may be shall not fail through want of willingness on my part."

Stooping over, he raised the heavy Bible to his lap, where he held it with a fondness difficult to imagine.

"When Iron Heart stayed at our house," he said to himself, "only a short time ago, he talked a good deal about the Great Spirit of the white man, and showed an interest deeper than I ever saw in anyone. It is too much to hope that his heart is still stirred as it was then, for he is in his war paint, and wrathful that one of his schemes has come to naught, and yet who shall say? who shall say?" re-

peated the cripple, glowing with the sweetest charity of which the human soul is capable.

Iron Heart was gifted with a strong magnetism which rendered his power over his subjects almost boundless. None of the most eloquent orators of the Six Nations could move the hearts of his hearers like him, and for no other leader would they do and dare so much.

In his lightning bursts of passion none had the hardihood to stand before him, and many an Oneida or Tuscarora or Mohawk or Seneca or Cayuga would have walked unflinchingly to certain death at his command.

The Wild Cat knew what would follow his accusation of warning the whites of their danger unless he proved his innocence, and he was, therefore, buoyed up to a courage in facing the chief which could not have been his at any other time. The Mohawk did not conduct his entire defence with skill, but the result could not have been more triumphant; he was acquitted, and Iron Heart himself assured him that the smell of fire remained not on his garments.

It was then that the magnetism of the chieftain asserted itself. The Wild Cat felt, at the moment of receiving the assurance from the lips of the great Seneca, that he asked no higher bliss than to die for him. But, trained from childhood to repress all show of emotion, he gave no evidence to others of the depth of his devotion to Iron Heart.

The Wild Cat, now that he was re-established in the favor of the mighty man, felt that he must do something to win a word of commendation from him. What should it be?

I have no doubt that every boy reader of this story has at some time experienced an emotion akin to that which fired the heart of the Mohawk. Perhaps it is your teacher in school, whose many kindnesses have so captured your heart that you have yearned for the chance to prove your devotion to her. Have you not wished that some band of robbers or pirates would swoop down on the school for the purpose of carrying her off, just to let her see you pounce on them and slay right and left?

Perhaps it is some gentle classmate, whose blue eyes, sunny smile and golden hair have played riot with your manly heart and awakened wild schemes for convincing her that the Crusaders of the olden times were nowhere compared with you. Perhaps—but this is delicate ground, and why venture farther?

You will understand, however, the feelings of the Wild Cat, after his vindication before his chief. With the same ardour that has fired many a boyish frame, he resolved to capture the heart of the Iroquois leader. What the special act should be the future must decide.

Knowing the purpose of Iron Heart when he paddled down the Catsuga with the three boys, the Wild Cat determined to follow him, but at such a distance that he could not suspect it.

The incidents of the evening had shown that one at least of the whites was hovering in the vicinity, and what more probable than that he would try to shoot or capture Iron Heart if he should venture away from his bodyguard? How blessed the opportunity of acting as his protector!

One of two facts dampened the enthusiasm of the Mohawk. He could not forget that Iron Heart had just returned from a journey to the lower settlement, made without a companion, and he might resent the imputation that he needed a bodyguard.

However, the Wild Cat's ardour would not allow him to be idle, and he stole after his chief unknown to the rest of the warriors, who no longer watched his every movement.

He was glad when he discovered a strange canoe between him and Iron Heart, for it gave colour to the story he meant to tell about learning that danger threatened the great man. He could not believe the stranger intended to attack, for if he had he would not have delayed it so long.

When it became apparent that the voyage to the blockhouse was to end without incident the Mohawk ran his boat into shore and started the fire, as I have described. This was a part of his boyish scheme to compel the regard of Iron Heart, and was in keeping with his Quixotic actions throughout the whole business.

Recognizing the signal of the Mohawk, the chieftain headed for the bluff on the top of which he caught the glimmer of the camp fire. A few strokes were sufficient to drive the prow of his boat against the shore.

The vigilant ears of Benny had noted the guarded signal, and he was looking around when the halt was made. His companion maintained his silence ever since the return trip was begun, and the lad did not break in upon it, satisfied to await the moment when the sachem chose to make his explanation.

As the shadowy outlines of the Mohawk came out from the gloom, Iron Heart stepped from the boat, leaving his companion in his seat, and awaited the story the Wild Cat had to tell.

It was in substance that the palefaces were abroad that night, that he had heard them in the woods and knew they were plotting evil against the Iroquois. For that cause he had started in quest of them, hoping to bring back the scalps of more than one enemy.

This was well enough so far as it went, but the statement as to why he had kindled the

fire in such a conspicuous place was less clear. He had followed the great hunter of the pale-faces (meaning Orris Ouden), but the white man eluded him. He was lurking in the neighborhood to do evil, but he was a squaw in courage. When the Mohawk sought to strike him he ran back among the trees, where he could not be seen. The Wild Cat had pursued him many times but could not catch him.

He had started the fire that he might tempt him to come forth. The Mohawk meant to lie in wait, and when he crept up so that the light from the flames shone on him, then would the warrior leap upon and slay him, and he would bring his scalp to lay at the feet of the mighty chieftain, Iron Heart.

This was a strange story, but one of the characteristics of the remarkable war chief of the Iroquois was his faculty in reading the intentions of others. He knew the Mohawk spoke the truth, and though he must have felt amused in his way at the erratic devotion of the subject, he could not fail to see its earnestness.

Questioned further, the Wild Cat explained that he expected to stay in the vicinity of the camp fire till daylight. His supposition was that the chief would continue up the river to the old Council Ground, or possibly to the encampment above that, leaving him to push his scheme to conclusion.

But Iron Heart broke in upon this arrangement in a most unexpected manner. Turning toward the listening boy, who had not missed a word, he extended his hand to help him from the boat. Benny needed little aid, but in climbing the bluff with his heavy Bible in one hand, he was grateful for the strong palm which clasped his own. The wondering Mohawk walked behind them, uncertain what it all meant.

Reaching the camp fire, Iron Heart motioned to the lad to seat himself on the stone near the blaze. Benny did so, and it could not have been more comfortable.

Then Iron Heart turned to the Wild Cat and informed him that he meant to stay there himself for a while. He wished to have a talk with the paleface lad, and this was the

best place that could be chosen, out of sight of the rest of the warriors. He signified to the Mohawk that even his presence was not desired, and the Wild Cat was not displeased thereat. He asked, however, to be allowed to act as sentinel during the meeting, for he was certain there would be a visit from their paleface enemies.

This request was conceded, and the Wild Cat walked slowly out in the gloom, taking a course toward the base of the bluff, where he stationed himself by the edge of the river, prepared to watch the interests of his chief-tain with the unselfish loyalty of a mastiff; and the prayer that he might be permitted to do so at the risk of his own life was granted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TEACHER AND PUPIL.

THE chieftain waited a few minutes after the Mohawk had vanished. He stood with the full glow of the fire falling upon his fine figure, and only a few paces from the lame lad, who surveyed him with wondering curiosity. The Seneca loosely grasped the barrel of his rifle, whose stock rested on the ground, and his left hand reposed idly on the blade of his tomahawk, slightly projecting from the girdle, the pose being that of a perfect athlete at rest.

Benny's crutch leaned against the boulder on which he had seated himself, his feet hanging over the side toward the blaze, while the Bible lay on the stone beside him. Something told him what was coming, and with a slight effort he changed his seat to the ground, his back being against the boulder, while the holy volume rested on his lap.

Looking fixedly at the lad for a second or two, the chieftain said:

"Iron Heart wants to hear his son talk about the Great Spirit of the white man."

This was uttered in Seneca, and the youth made answer in the same tongue:

"My heart is glad to tell you all I know, but the Great Spirit of the white man is the Great Spirit of the red man, and of all the people that dwell on the earth. He loves them and wants them to love one another."

"Iron Heart has heard the missionaries say those words to the Indians, but the pale-faces do not love each other; they fight, as the Indians do."

"The words of the chief are true; there are many evil white men, as there are red men, and they care nothing for the smiles of the Great Spirit, but grieve him every day. But all white men are not so, and the Great Spirit does not grieve when his children fight to take care of their wives and children and lands."

"Then he loves the Indian when he fights the palefaces that steal away his hunting grounds?"

The wise lad saw he must utter some unwelcome truths, and he did not hesitate.

"When the Great Spirit made the woods and rivers, and prairies and mountains and plains, He meant them for all his children. There is room for them, whether they be white or red or dark, and He wishes them to live together in love toward one another. How much land does Iron Heart want?" asked Benny, looking him bravely in the eye; "there is more than he and his children need."

"But the Indian lived here first," said the chief, with something of impatience in his voice. "Why did not the paleface stay on the other side of the water where the Great Spirit placed him? Why does he cross the great water to steal the hunting grounds of the Indian?"

"Do not the Indians fight with each other?"

"It is the wish of Manitou, for when he put it into the hearts of the Tuscaroras to join the Iroquois, that they might become the Six Nations, he meant that they should be the masters of the other Indians."

"Iron Heart is wrong; the Great Spirit does not wish any people to make servants of others; Iron Heart does not do right when he leads his warriors against the white settlers; he grieves the Great Spirit."

The chieftain maintained his immovable posture, but now and then his black eyes shone with a threatening light. His whole life had been in opposition to this strange doctrine of love and charity to which he was listening, and it was too much to expect the moral revolution to perfect itself in a few minutes, though it must be borne in mind that he had given much thought to this most important subject that can interest the human mind.

"My son once told me about One that died for us," he remarked, in a gentler voice, calling up the theme that had taken the strongest hold upon him.

"Yes, we have talked about it several times, Iron Heart; it is the sweetest and most wonderful story that was ever told. He had the power to slay all those who put him to a cruel death, but he did not say an evil word

when they struck him and one pierced his side with a spear. He knew his father was angry with his people, who had done wrong, and the only way to drive the frown from his face was to suffer with his hands and feet nailed to the cross; so he died."

The lad now opened the Bible at an engraving of the crucifixion, and motioned to the chieftain to place himself beside him. Iron Heart obeyed, and, as the light shone on the sacred page, he fixed his eyes with strange interest on the picture.

"There he hangs on the cross, between two evil men," added Benny. "You know that the chiefs of great nations wear crowns of gold on their heads; the bad people put on the Saviour's head a crown made of thorns that added to his pain; a soldier thrust his spear in his side, and when he asked for water they gave him that which did not quench thirst, but made him suffer still more. He could have smitten all with death, but he forgave them and bore his anguish in silence."

It was a theme almost beyond the grasp of

the savage, but who shall say that a divine light was not beginning to steal into the dark breast, helping to make plain the simple yet marvellous story of the Saviour of the world.

Iron Heart did not speak, but, seated beside the lame lad, he gazed with heaving breast on the picture. Benny waited a minute or two, and with the book still open on his lap said, in a low, musical voice :

"He was the Son of the Great Spirit, and he, too, was the Great Spirit. He does not ask Iron Heart to die as he did, but he asks him to love his brothers, just as he loves every one of his children."

"But if he died," said the chieftain, "how can he live and love the palefaces and the Indians?"

The lad turned the pages to the picture of the resurrection.

"They placed the body of the Saviour, as we call him, in the grave, but on the third day his Father breathed life into it, and it became as it was before."

"Where did he go?"

"He stayed on earth long enough for some

of his friends to see and talk with him, and then he went beyond the clouds, where he is now looking down on Iron Heart and his warriors, and wishing they would bury the hatchet and live in peace."

This was plain doctrine, and it was hard to believe, but away down in the heart of the fiery Iroquois something whispered to him that the words of the boy were true.

Benny laid a hand on the brawny shoulder, and looking into the painted face so close to his own, asked:

"Has not my father heard a voice when he was alone in the woods that whispered the words I have spoken to him? Has not something said to him, when he showed kindness, that he was pleasing the Great Spirit? And when Iron Heart's wrath has led him to bury the tomahawk in the brain of his foe, has he not felt saddened because he thought that Manitou had veiled his face?"

The chieftain did not reply. His eyes still rested on the printed page as though there was a fascination in it which he could not resist. His face was slightly lower than the

youth's, for he was reclining on one elbow, while Benny sat upright.

The heart of the boy gave a quick throb, for—strange sight!—he saw that which no one had ever seen. Underneath each eyelid glistened a tear in the firelight.

The Iroquois did not brush them away, and never knew that his young friend was aware of the extraordinary fact. He winked rapidly once or twice, and the tell-tale moisture vanished.

"Tell Iron Heart more," he said, in a voice so low that, had not perfect stillness reigned, his words would not have been heard.

"The story is simple, and I can add little to it; all this took place a great many moons ago, longer than the traditions that have come down to my father tell him about. The Great Spirit has His home beyond the clouds, and His eye is never closed. At this time, when the sun's face is hidden, He is looking down on the world, and He sees everything. More than that, not only does He see Iron Heart at this moment, but He knows every thought in his heart; nothing can be hidden from Him."

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"Tell Iron Heart more."

The Iroquois for the first time roused from the spell that had gradually taken possession of him. He abruptly came to a sitting posture, and there was no trace of tears in the flashing eyes he fixed upon the startled countenance beside him.

"Iron Heart was born a warrior," said he, with something of his old fierceness; "he learned to hate the palefaces who left their own country to steal his hunting grounds; he has sunk his tomahawk in their brains; he has torn their scalps from their heads; he has met them in the woods and buried his knife in their hearts; he does not fear them, for Manitou has given him a strong arm, a quick eye, a knowledge greater than his enemies."

Instead of replying by words, Benny quietly turned once more to the illustration of the Crucifixion, and laying his finger on it, looked calmly into the wrathful countenance.

The chief kept his eye fixed on the face of the lad for a minute, as if fighting against some impulse tugging at his heart; but whatever the impulse of that mysterious force, it prevailed. The flashing eyes dropped to the

page, he quietly rested on his elbow and fixed his attention on the wonderful scene.

What the result of this strange conference might have been it is impossible to say ; but as the serpent crept into the garden of Eden, so stole the intruders upon the scene, which, for the time, scattered all the good seed to the winds.

Iron Heart and Benny heard at the same instant the fracture of a twig near them. They started, the chieftain grasping his rifle, which he had laid against the rock beside him, and landing upright on his feet at a single bound.

But incredibly quick as was the movement, it came too late !

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LEVELLED RIFLES.

ORRIS OUDEN had made his compact with General Greenfield, and, cruel as it may strike you, it must be remembered that the settlers were placed on the defensive by the most powerful confederation of Indians ever known on the American continent. War is the essence of cruelty, and deeds which can only awake horror in times of peace are often made necessary by the law of self-preservation. Enough had passed between the officer and the hunter for them to understand each other perfectly ; and, having bidden the General good-night, Ouden withdrew.

Leaving the blockhouse, he made his way at a leisurely pace between the cabins standing near, taking a direction which led to the Catsuga, where he had left his canoe. As he

reached the spot he saw the outlines of a man attired somewhat like himself, who was pacing back and forth, as if impatient at the delay.

"Is that you, Burt?" asked Ouden, as he approached.

"Yes; and I thought you'd never get through."

"It took time to put matters in shape," returned Ouden; "but it's all fixed now."

"How?"

"Five hundred dollars in gold—that is, half to you and half to me—as soon as the job is done."

"It isn't going to be any child's play either," said the other, who seemed less enthusiastic than Ouden.

"If it was, the General wouldn't pay five hundred dollars for the work."

"Why did Iron Heart take that lame boy with him?" growled his friend, Burt Pendleton, who belonged to the garrison, and had a reputation as a scout hardly second to that of Orris Ouden himself.

"That's one of the whims of the chief, though I'm sorry, but I don't know as it will

make any difference, for the younker is of no account in this business, and he may be the means of keeping Iron Heart from hurryin' back too fast."

"Little chance of that; git in; I'll use the paddle."

Ouden took his seat at the prow, Pendleton placing himself well toward the stern, and handling the blade with a skill equal to that of the other.

It would seem that the impatience of Pendleton was justified, for, since the campaign was to be a personal one against Iron Heart, valuable time had been lost by the interview between Ouden and General Greenfield. On that night, however, fortune once more smiled on the daring scout.

Recalling the strange canoe and its occupant, who had withdrawn from the singular pursuit at a distance of about a mile from the blockhouse, Ouden whispered to Pendleton to keep close to the southern shore, and to watch and listen for all he was worth. By taking the bank opposite to that along which he had descended there was less de-

running into any ambush the stranger might set for such a pursuit.

It was a wise move, for at the very time that both were on the watch for danger they caught a glimmer of the camp fire on the bluff. Instantly Burt Pendleton ceased packing, and the two consulted for several minutes.

The fire was a mystery which, with all their sagacity, neither could explain. It had been started in obedience to a curious notion of the Wild Cat, and it would have been strange if the scouts, with their ignorance of the Mohawk, had rightly interpreted the meaning. And yet Ouden struck an inkling of the truth.

"From what that lame younker has told me about Iron Heart," said he, "and from what I've seed, there's a strange likin' atween the two, and if I'm not mistook they're for of talkin' religion atween 'em, which is mighty qu'ar, when you think of the style of the same Iroquois; but religion is a subject, Burt, which it wouldn't hurt some other folks to think about. I shouldn't wond

now if the varmint has stopped the boat, gone ashore and built a fire to have another talk with the younker on the same subject, though I admit it ain't very likely."

"What about t'other varmint that chased you down the river?" inquired Burt.

"I give that up; but let us investigate."

They retrogressed, still close to the southern bank, until secure against discovery, when a few strong strokes sent the boat flying to the other shore. It was too soon for the rising moon, and they felt no misgiving that they had been seen by their enemy.

Ouden did not forget the stranger in the boat, though he hardly suspected he was with Iron Heart, for if the latter had stopped at this point to have a free talk with the lame boy he would not be likely to allow anyone else to be present.

It may be said that the progress of the craft was now almost inch by inch, or at most foot by foot, for there was a feeling on the part of the hunters that they were nearing the crisis of the desperate enterprise in which they were engaged. The canoe was checked before

reaching a point opposite to the foot of the bluff. The scouts thought it best to land and push their investigations on foot where they were able to advance without noise or the danger of detection.

In this Pendleton took the lead, stealing along the shore, seemingly without any noise at all, while Ouden was just far enough behind to escape treading on his heels. At such times the trained scout never allows his impatience to betray him into any undue or reckless step. Without a whisper or halt they pushed on until Ouden felt the hand of Pendleton touch his breast. He had reached back to signal his companion to stop. Turning his head, the leader placed his mouth against the ear of Ouden and whispered:

"He's thar!"

"I don't believe it; it's some one else."

"Wait till I find out."

With the same noiseless movement Bur handed his rifle to Ouden to hold until the question should be settled. He resumed his advance, and in the gloom the other hunter could barely distinguish the outlines of his

head and shoulders. A minute later there was a fall—the sound of a terrific struggle—hurried breathing, but no outcry—and then all became still.

"You war right," whispered Pendleton, as he rejoined his friend, speaking with more freedom; "it warn't Iron Heart."

"Didn't you git scratched, Burt?"

"Nothin' of the kind; I cotched him foul; he had his back toward me, and the next thing he knowed he didn't know nothin'."

The Wild Cat had craved the privilege of risking his life to attest his loyalty to his chief, and the opportunity was given him. Not only that, but life itself was sacrificed as clearly as any person ever died for another.

"That must have been the varmint that followed me," remarked Ouden, no more moved by the fearful incident than if it had been a deer that he had brought to earth.

"What was he doin' thar?"

"Iron Heart put him at the foot of the bluff to watch for just such gentlemen as us."

"Wal, he didn't amount to much as a watcher, and he won't be bothered with any

more work of the kind. Do you s'pose there are any more of the varmints around?"

"I can't say for sartin, but it ain't likely. Now for the camp fire."

"I'll take the right and you the left."

"Very well; and we'll come together on t'other side and fix things arter we larn just how they stand."

The hunters separated and began feeling their way up the bluff with the same striking skill that enabled them to crush the Mohawk on guard without giving him a chance to warn his chieftain by a single outcry.

So remarkably similar was their progress that they arrived at the point of meeting at precisely the same moment. As Ouden had suggested, it was beyond the camp fire.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IRON HEART A PRISONER.

THEY now stole forward once more until near enough to look upon the strangest scene of their lives. On the other side of the fire sat Benny Morris, with his back against the boulder, an open Bible in his lap, while he was talking in a low, earnest voice to the mighty Iroquois chieftain, who was reclining on one elbow, with his gun leaning against the stone beside him and his eyes fixed on the holy book. The sight was enough to touch the sympathies of the most abandoned man, but there was no sentiment of pity in the hearts of the two hunters.

A brother of Burt's had felt the weight of Iron Heart's vengeance, and Ouden had come within a hair of losing his scalp to the same terrible warrior. They had the most dreaded foe of the frontier at their mercy, and they

meant he should not escape. The distance separating them from the Iroquois was not more than a dozen yards, and the glow of the camp fire, which was beginning to smolder, was reflected against the barrels of the guns as they came slowly to a level, with the muzzles pointing straight at the breast of the suspicious savage, who at the moment was thinking of a question the opposite of war and bloodshed.

The guns of both Orris Ouden and Bur Pendleton were levelled directly at Iron Heart, the Iroquois chieftain, and a slight pressure was only needed to send the bullets through his heart and end his career forever.

But though Pendleton hated the Seneca with an inextinguishable hatred, and the resentment of Ouden was scarcely less, there was something in the shooting of the Indian as he sat beside the cripple, listening to the sacred story of the cross, and with no suspicion of danger, that stirred a revolt in the breast of Ouden.

Reaching out his hand, he softly grasped the gun barrel of his comrade and pulled

slightly aside. Pendleton glanced at him with an angry, inquiring look. Ouden shook his head and whispered :

"It won't do, Burt, keep your gun pointed at him, but don't pull the trigger unless he kicks."

As he spoke, Ouden purposely disturbed a twig with his foot, so as to rouse the attention of Iron Heart, who, as I have told you, bounded to his feet, rifle in hand, and confronted his foes.

The first glance cast in the direction of the ominous sound showed him the two scouts, standing as erect as himself, and with their guns pointed at him. The brown barrels reflected the glow of the fire, and had the sun been shining, he could have looked into the muzzles of the weapons.

Ordinarily all this would have made no difference to Iron Heart, who, after the manner of his people, hardly knew the meaning of submission, but, like a cornered wild cat, would scratch and bite and fight when he knew that he had but to surrender to save his life.

But though roused to fury, and possessing his old courage, skill and hurricane-like impetuosity, the chieftain, even in that fearful moment, could not entirely throw off the spell of the strange words that had just been uttered in his ears.

Instead of flinging up his rifle and letting it drive, or bounding over the boulder with a yell of defiance, he grasped his gun and stared at the hunters as though dazed.

"Stand still, Iron Heart, and you won't be hurt; but if you stir you are a dead Seneca as sartin as my name is Orris Ouden."

The hunter took a couple of steps forward, whispering to Burt to keep his weapon at level and to fire on the first move of the chieftain but not otherwise. Then he walked on, extending his hand.

"That shootin' iron if you please, likewise the knife, and not forgittin' the tomahawk, it's all the same to you."

Incredible as it may seem, the chieftain allowed these weapons to be taken from him one after the other, without the least movement in the way of resistance.

But if the Iroquois was bewildered, there was one in the party who was not. Little Benny Morris was as quick as the chief to glance across the camp fire and catch sight of the hunters standing in the dim light with their pieces pointed at Iron Heart, and the lad seemed to be quicker than he in grasping the meaning of the terrifying sight.

Hastily shutting the Bible, he caught hold of the edge of the boulder and helped himself to his feet, seizing his crutch and leaning upon it for support.

But for his lameness, and the fact that his frame was too slight to serve the purpose, he would have flung himself in front of the Iroquois as a shield against the threatened shots; but the words of Ouden proved that they meant to take the leader prisoner.

Benny Morris was in a towering rage, if you can conceive it possible for such a loving lad to be really angry. His fine eyes flashed as the hunter came forward, and he demanded:

"What business have you to disturb us, Ouden?"

The hunter looked at him with a quizzical smile, not forgetting to hold the prisoner in his field of vision, and asked, with an expression of comicality:

"Have you ever heard, youngster, that Iron Heart has done something in the way of botherin' white people?"

"But he isn't doing anything now."

"'Cause he can't, and we don't mean he shall; he belongs to us now, and I am sure it'll be a powerful while afore he gits a chance to tomahawk any more women and children."

Benny could not but see the warrant for Ouden's course. Frontier law would not have condemned him had he shot down the Iroquois without warning, and he was already liable to the charge of weakness for the mercy shown him.

"You have made a mistake, a great one," said Benny, seeing he was helpless to befriender the captive.

"You'll think different when you git older," quietly replied the hunter, motioning for Peterson to approach.

The latter came forward, grinning with e

ultation over the easy capture of the most dangerous enemy of the frontier. Iron Heart remained motionless, as if unable to rally from the bewilderment of the sudden change of condition.

"Come," said Ouden, sharply, nodding to Pendleton, "we must be off."

"Where are we going?" asked Benny.

"To the blockhouse; thar's no need of staying here."

Ouden moved down the bluff, followed by Iron Heart, glum and silent, with Pendleton directly behind and close enough to strike him down should he offer resistance. At the rear was the lad, who, burdened with his Bible, had all he could conveniently carry.

Ouden led the way to the canoe, which he had left a short distance above the spot where the Wild Cat had paid with his life the penalty of his faithfulness.

It must have been that in the few minutes between his summons to surrender and the arrival at the foot of the bluff the Iroquois leader believed the Mohawk, whom he had fully trusted, had after all proved a traitor.

How else could the white men have stol upon the camp without detection and made him captive?

His furious resentment, therefore, was turned against the warrior rather than against his captors; and as he quietly followed them down the slight slope the greatest boon that he asked just then was the chance to punish the ingrate.

But the dark eyes which darted here and there in the gloom told him the impressive truth. During the last few minutes the moon had climbed high enough in the sky for its light to fall upon the Catsuga. Partly hidden in the shadow of the trees lay the form, stiff and stiffening, where it had fallen under the crushing attack of Burt Pendleton.

It told the story. The Iroquois cast a sidle, penetrating glance at the body and heaved a sigh. The attention of Benny happened to be elsewhere at that moment, and his thoughts were so preoccupied that he did not learn the truth until some time later.

Arrived at the canoe, there was a moment's hesitation by the prisoner. It may have been

curred to him that he was acting the squaw in submitting without protest to his degradation. True, his weapons were in possession of his enemies, but what was to hinder him from making a single terrific bound among the trees and defying them? The risk was no greater than he had run scores of times, and fear was unknown to him.

Benny guessed the conflict in the mind of the chieftain. Laying his hand on his arm, he said in his native tongue:

"Step in the canoe, father."

The Iroquois silently obeyed, placing himself near the middle. Pendleton sat behind him, where he could watch every movement, while Ouden, just ahead of the middle of the boat, raised the paddle, Benny once more taking his old seat in the prow.

Though the hunters felt in a jubilant mood, they refrained from any expression of their feelings, not out of sympathy for their royal captive, but because of Benny Morris, whose grief touched them.

"I don't blame the youngster for feelin' sorry for the varmint," thought the hunter,

as he plied the paddle in a leisurely way, "for Iron Heart has done more for him than he ever done for any other chap that didn't belong to his own race; but that can't make no difference. The chief is gettin' all his warriors together, and would be sartin to wipe out a good many of our people afore he would be willin' to wash off his war paint.

"S'pose me and Burt had shot him as we meant to," he added, following out the train of thought which he had started, "I don't believe it would have been half as good as this way. General Greenfield said that as long as Iron Heart was alive there could never be any peace along the frontier, but that if he was out of the way the Injins would be conquered.

"Maybe he's right, but I ain't sure of it. I've thought sometimes that if we should kill Iron Heart, it would make all the tribes of the Iroquois so much madder than afore that they would fight ten times harder than ever. Instead of bein' scared, they would be like the she painter when the hunter shoots one of her young; they would sail in harder than ever.

"But s'pose we've got him prisoner; we can send word to the Six Nations that as long as they behave themselves the chief will be safe, but the first white person they harm, off goes his scalp!"

This theory sounded reasonable, but as the hunter gave it fuller thought, he saw there were grave objections.

However, the problem of establishing and preserving peace along the frontier was one that had baffled wiser heads than his, as the history of our settlements prove, and the hunter was content to leave its solution to those that were higher in authority.

He had performed his part in the humbler sphere of duty, and was warranted in claiming that the most brilliant achievement of his eventful career was that which he had just accomplished.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CONFERENCE.

ALTHOUGH General Greenfield left the impression on Ouden that it was the death of Iron Heart he desired, rather than the possession of the chieftain, yet that office was not without doubt as to the wisdom of slaying the terrible leader of the Iroquois.

The reward offered the scout was for the capture or death of the sachem, and when, late that night, the captive was brought into the blockhouse, the General could hardly credit the good news.

His perplexity over the uprising of the Iroquois confederation amounted to the keenest distress. The rumours had been coming to his ears for weeks, and he had done all in his power to allay the excitement among the tribes. But for the fact that the emissaries of the national enemy were bestirring them

selves with equal vigor and greater cunning, the threatened storm could have been averted.

To put the matter in another form, but for the implacable foe of the settlers, Iron Heart, the efforts of the white men would not have come to naught. Every advance to the Iroquois leader was rejected with scorn, until the officer was forced to believe that a cruel border war was inevitable.

It was at this critical juncture that Iron Heart became a prisoner and was brought to the blockhouse. What wonder that General Greenfield was in high spirits over the exploit.

The rough structure in which the officer made his headquarters was not fashioned with apartments intended for prisoners, for, truth to tell, such individuals were not taken in very large numbers in those days along the frontier. Still it is probable no place would have been as secure as one of the rough, strong rooms where a captive was sure to be under the eyes at all times of some of the guard.

The hour was so late when the captive was

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brought in that the officer had retired, but he arose and met the captors to listen to their story and to see the captive, whom he had never met, though he had heard so much of him during late years.

General Greenfield was too thorough a gentleman to allow the grim prisoner to discover any evidence of the pleasure he felt over his downfall. He merely gave him one searching look, and then directed his captors to take him to the cabin, standing hardly a hundred yards from the blockhouse, and which had been used on several occasions for the confinement of troublesome characters.

"Good-night," said Benny, as he started to walk away. Iron Heart accepted the extended hand, but did not return the pressure, nor did the coppery lips break the silence he had maintained from the moment he allowed his weapons to be taken from him.

"I will see my father to-morrow," added the lad, for his comfort, while his own heart was inexpressibly saddened by what had taken place.

At this late hour there was no one awake

in the settlement beside the garrison in the blockhouse, and the few sentinels kept on duty on the outskirts, since the discovery of the hostility of the Iroquois. Benny therefore accepted the invitation of General Greenfield to stay in the fort for the few hours that remained of night, deferring his visit to his sleeping brothers until the morrow, when, as you may suppose, they were astonished to learn what had taken place while they were asleep.

At an early hour on the morrow General Greenfield held an earnest talk with Orris Ouden and Burt Pendleton. He had slept little himself, and was still in doubt as to the best course to take with the royal prisoner.

The latter was confined in the simplest kind of a prison that can be imagined. It was a structure of substantial logs, and about a dozen feet square, without a window or opening except the door through which the chief was pushed. The floor was of logs, but there was no fireplace, and nothing in the shape of furniture, unless the bison robes in one corner be classed as such. If it should

fall to the lot of any offender to be confined in this guardhouse very long during the wintry weather, the principal punishment must have consisted in the discomfort of the place.

Two guards continually paced back and forth in front of the primitive prison, with orders to allow no one to approach or communicate with the captive.

When it became known that Iron Heart had been brought in a prisoner, and was in confinement at that moment, there was naturally great excitement and curiosity to see him.

"I have been thinking over this business," said General Greenfield to the hunters, "ever since you brought the Iroquois in, and I'm blessed if I know what is the best thing to do."

"I hain't been in any doubt since we grabbed him," remarked Pendleton, with the manner of one who pitied a mind so constituted that it couldn't see things as he did.

"What is your plan?" said the General.

"Draw bead on the varmint and let fly; Ouden never orter interfered last night."

"I wouldn't said nothin'," remarked Ouden, "if it hadn't been just as it war; but I couldn't do it when he war listenin' to the younker readin' from his Bible."

"Whether or not a mistake was then made it is too late now to think of anything of the kind," said General Greenfield, who, thorough soldier as he was, half regretted that the scout prevented the shot that would have forced matters to a speedy issue.

But the Iroquois was now a prisoner, and so long as he remained such no harm could be offered him, though I have no doubt you know that Osceola, the famous leader of the Seminoles, years after the incident I am describing, was made a prisoner under a flag of truce, and kept in confinement until he died.

"I have about decided," added the General, after a moment's silence, "to follow the plan that Ouden has recommended—that is to notify the Iroquois that we have Iron Heart, and intend to hold him as a hostage for their good behavior."

"They may rally and rush down here, de-

terminated to have the old varmint; they'll make a good fight for him."

"They have a right to do that, of course, and I should be prepared for it. There would be some lively fighting, especially if they knew that the moment we found we couldn't hold Iron Heart we would let daylight through him."

"But," said Ouden, more impressed than his companion by the difficulties in their way, "how are we going to get word to the Senecas, Mohawks and other tribes that we've got him, and that we mean to hold on to him as long as we choose?"

"Can't you go and tell them?"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be healthy for me," replied the hunter, shaking his head, with a laugh; "s'pose I should walk into thar camp and explanify matters, don't you s'pose they would drop down on to me quicker'n lightning, and wouldn't they hold on to me and send word to you that if Iron Heart wasn't let loose inside of three seconds and a half they'd carve me into bits? Burt, wouldn't you like to be the messenger to walk into the Injin camp with the news?"

"Not just yet," replied Pendleton, while General Greenfield saw there was a big difficulty in the way of which he had not thought.

"There seems to be only one feasible plan," added the officer, partly amused by the manner of the hunters, "and that is to go out and catch another Indian, drill him awhile in his lesson, and then send him back to his people."

"I don't know how we are going to catch him," said Pendleton, "for we ain't likely to have things fixed as well as they were with Iron Heart."

"I have it!" exclaimed Ouden; "it can be settled without any trouble at all."

"That's one person who needn't fear to go among the varmints; that's young Benny Morris, the lame boy, who was with Iron Heart when we gathered him in."

"But will he go?" asked General Greenfield.

"He won't hesitate a minute."

"But if he is lame how can he manage it? We must not put too great a burden on his shoulders."

"I'll paddle up the Catsuga till we're so close to the old Council Ground or other encampment that I can step ashore and let him go the rest of the way alone."

"That sounds feasible enough," observed General Greenfield, looking thoughtfully at the floor; "but are you sure the resentment of the Iroquois will not be turned against the little fellow himself? And if it isn't, how is he to get back, since it will hardly be safe for you to want to help him out?"

"Let's have him in here and talk it over."

Ouden sprang up and left the blockhouse, returning a few minutes later with Benny, who naturally wondered what could be wanted of him.

The situation was quickly explained.

"I'll go," he said, as soon as the project was clear; "I'll bear the message to the Iroquois."

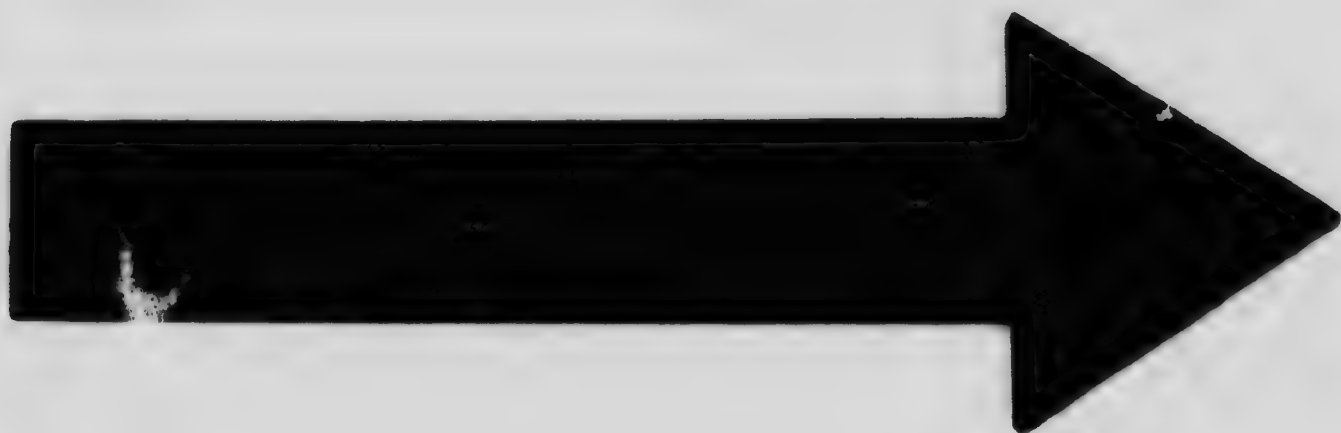
"But they may hold you as a hostage," suggested General Greenfield, unable to feel entirely at ease over the plan of the hunter.

"I am not of sufficient importance," replied the lad with an amused smile.

"We cannot be sure they will not think you are."

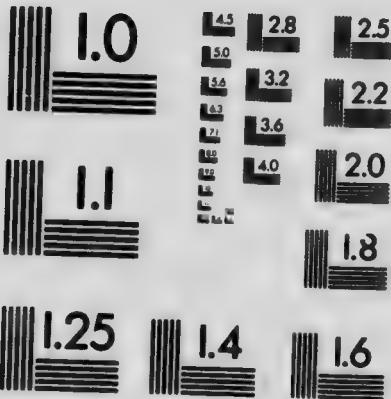
"No; but what of it? Perhaps they will fall on me and cut me to pieces, but they won't do it until after I have delivered my message, and that's all you want."

"Not by a good deal!" exclaimed General Greenfield, amazed to hear the lad discuss his own probable death with such coolness; "if there's any risk to you, you don't go—that's all."



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CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BEARER OF DISPATCHES.

WHEN the situation was fully explained to Benny, he saw that the scheme General Greenfield could not be carried out unless someone went to the Iroquois encampments and made known to the warriors the only conditions by which the life of the famous leader could be saved.

"I will go," said he, "and I shall be satisfied if I can first have a talk with Iron Heart."

"Do so, by all means," replied the officer, "for the warriors coming upon the dead body of the Wild Cat will suspect the truth, and if we wait too long it will be worse than if no one goes at all."

General Greenfield walked beside the messenger to the door of the strong cabin in which the chieftain was confined. The settlers gathered around were kept at a respectful distance, but as is the case when a person

hanged, they seemed to find enjoyment in looking upon the building which held the redoubtable warrior.

The two guards opened the door, ready to check any rush the prisoner might make, but there was nothing of the kind. The entrance being thus clear, enough light entered the apartment to show the interior quite plainly, though when it was closed Iron Heart was in blank darkness.

Benny peered around for a moment or two, until his eyes became accustomed to the partial gloom. He expected to see the chieftain reclining on the bison skins in the corner, but was slightly startled when he became aware that he was standing directly in front of him, with his arms folded, and looking down in the face of the visitor.

"You frightened me, my father," said Benny, with a laugh, "for my eyes at first saw you not."

"The heart of Iron Heart is glad to look upon the face of his son," said the chief, thereby uttering the most extensive remark he had made since his misfortune.

"My heart is sorrowful for my father," the lad, who could not fail to have a conception of the bitter imaginings that must have raged in that breast, and were raging there. "I would give my own life to save that of my father, for he has been kind to me and mine, but I can do nothing."

Enough light fell upon the painted features to show the frightful glitter of the black eyes, but there was a softness in them when they rested on the handsome face of the lad, who looked so trustfully up in his countenance.

The Iroquois made no answer, and Ben added :

"I wish to visit the encampments of the Iroquois with a message from General Greaves to your warriors, saying that if they cease their war against the settlements no harm shall come to Iron Heart, but if they make war, then shall Iron Heart be put to death."

"Let my son go, he shall not be harmed," said the chief, manifesting no interest in the business the boy said was to lead him thither.

"Whom shall I see?" asked the lad, not fully satisfied with the words of the chief.

"Leaping Horse; he is chief when Iron Heart is not there; he is a Tuscarora; he is a brave warrior."

"But," continued Benny, "when Leaping Horse and his warriors learn that Iron Heart is a prisoner at the blockhouse, will they allow me to come back to my people? They can't lose anything by keeping me, and they won't let me come back."

"Tell Leaping Horse that it is the word that Iron Heart sends him!" said the chief, in a voice so loud and angry that it was heard by those outside; "he will not disobey Iron Heart."

Benny could not help thinking differently, since the Seneca seemed not to realize that he was not likely ever to resume his authority among his people, who could now dare to do that which none dared to do when he was present with them.

There were many things the lad would have liked to say to the chief, but after seeing his mood he deemed it best to defer it. He meant to have another interview with the captive immediately on his return from his mis-

sion, when he would give his report, and a good deal that was hardly appropriate then. So Benny bade his father "good-by," telling him that they would soon have other talk, and asking him to keep in good spirits. Iron Heart gave no reply, then passed out, and the door was shut.

The youth made inquiry of the guard who told him that food and drink had been twice offered the chief, but he refused to touch either. They believed he would starve himself to death, sullen, grim and defiant to the last. Not one of the settlers could understand why the fiery leader had allowed himself to be taken prisoner, for it would have been in keeping with his nature had he turned like an infuriated wild beast and fought to the death.

Within less than half an hour after the interview I have told you about, Orris O'Connell was driving his canoe swiftly up the Catskill with Benny Morris seated in his old place at the prow, both watchful and observant for the first signs of their enemies. The hunter rushed hurriedly to the scene of the capture

the Iroquois chieftain, glancing only at the inanimate figure still stretched on the margin of the wood, where it had fallen under the resistless assault of Pendleton.

The sight told him that the capture of Iron Heart could not be known as yet to the other warriors, and Benny, therefore, was sure to be the bearer of astounding tidings to the assembled red men, who were doubtless wondering at the absence of their leader.

As the boat approached the vicinity of the old Council Ground, Ouden grew cautious, for the sun was shining, and it was all-important that he should elude discovery by those who would have been only too eager to attack him.

The hunter's familiarity with the river told him when he was just below the bend above which some of Iron Heart's warriors were gathered. Approaching as near as was prudent, he touched shore and stepped out.

"I'll wait here for you," he said.

"But how will you know whether I'm coming back? They may decide to hold me as the best hostage they can get for Iron Heart."

"I'll know what they mean to do," replied the hunter, significantly.

"How? Will you watch the camp?"

"I'll wait till the middle of the afternoon if you don't show up by that time, I'll look into things."

"All right; there's no need of my telling you to have a care, for you and I, Oude, stand on a different footing with the Indians."

"I reckon I've had a 'spicion of that," remarked the hunter, with a laugh; "and with you now, and keep your wits about you."

Since the lad was deficient only in one of his lower limbs, the extra service required of the upper ones gave them considerable strength, as both Tom and Jack could certify from the numerous whacks they had received when he sought to check their boisterousness.

It was not much of a task, therefore, for him to paddle the canoe which carried only himself. Indeed, he felt able to make the entire trip from and to the settlement, but

General Greenfield thought it unwise to run the risk, since he might be caught in a storm, or be obliged to return at night.

A person engaged on business like that of the lad could do nothing more ill-advised than to display timidity in nearing the Indian camp. He therefore paddled straight to the old Council Ground, where he was surprised to observe so many warriors gathered that there could be no doubt the entire number at the encampments above had come down the river.

The sight was one which caused a quicker throbbing of the lad's heart, though it pleased him, since he was sure of finding the leading chief, Leaping Horse, and making his news known at once to the whole body of hostiles.

As near as the bearer of dispatches could judge, there were a hundred warriors assembled on the old Council Ground, listening to an address of one of their chiefs. The moment the boy was observed in the canoe the speech was checked, and a general look of inquiry directed toward the messenger. Most of the warriors went to the river, which was so near

that when Benny stepped from his canoe, and with the help of his crutches began limping up the gentle incline, he had not far to go before he found himself surrounded by Indians belonging to nearly all the tribes composing the Iroquois confederation. Most of them looked scowlingly at him, but he saluted them pleasantly, and, speaking in Seneca, asked for Leaping Horse.

Those who were unacquainted with the lad were astonished to hear him use one of their tongues so well, but the chief whom he wished to see was pointed out. He was the orator that was addressing the assemblage when the lad first appeared.

He was as fine a specimen of the American Indian as Iron Heart himself, . . . he stood with folded arms and his gleaming eyes centered on the lad, who walked quietly through the staring multitude and halted near the middle of the broad clearing in front of the leader.

Benny had decided to come to the point as quickly as he could, avoiding the usual circumlocution of diplomacy. Unable to speak

Tuscarora, he addressed the chief in Seneca, which was understood by nearly all the listeners gathered around.

"I come from the great Iroquois chieftain, Iron Heart, who sends me to bear his words to Leaping Horse, the Tuscarora, and the leader of the brave warriors when Iron Heart is not with them."

Despite the usual stoicism of the American Indians the lad saw that this announcement had produced a sensation. There was that indescribable stir and buzz which proved it, and he felt that every eye was fastened on him.

Leaping Horse understood Seneca, and he demanded, in that tongue :

"Where is the great chieftain, Iron Heart?"

"He is at the settlement of the palefaces; he was made a prisoner last night; he is held in the cabins of the palefaces, who will not let him go; they wish me to tell Leaping Horse and his warriors that if they bury the hatchet and harm the settlers no more, then shall Iron Heart be kept safe; but if the Iroquois stay on the war path, Iron Heart shall be slain."

If the first words of the messenger produced an agitation, you can understand the excitement caused by this message, which included all the boy had to tell. The buzzing talking, restless moving to and fro, and the fierce looks cast at Benny, filled him with fear that he had not been circumspect enough and that the warriors in their anger were ready to fall upon him.

"Iron Heart told me to say to Leaping Horse," he added, before any response could be made to his message, "that I should come to you and that you would be my friend and——"

"It is a lie!" thundered Leaping Horse, laying his hand on his knife and striding toward the lad; "Iron Heart sent no such word to his warriors! The palefaces have slain him! The Iroquois will burn all the settlements! They will tomahawk all the palefaces, their squaws and papooses; they will let none escape! They will tear the scalps from their heads! The words we hear are lies——"

"The words are true!" rang out a voice

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“The words are true!” rang out a voice.”

more thunderous tones as a warrior bounded through the assemblage in front of the Tuscarora, and, as all eyes were drawn to him, they saw that he was Iron Heart, chieftain of the Iroquois !

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IRON HEART'S ESCAPE.

SHORTLY after the departure of Orris Ouden and Benny Morris, the guards over Iron Heart were changed. One of the new ones was Burt Pendleton, who had taken such an active part in capturing the grim warrior.

This hunter was lacking in many of the finer qualities which showed in Ouden. He had no sympathy for that sentimentality which led his companion to save the life of the leader, and, as you will recall, was free in so declaring to General Greenfield during their interview.

Finding himself installed as one of the keepers of the dreaded Seneca, Burt could not help showing a coarse exultation over his humiliation.

"I'm told the varmint hasn't eaten nothin'

since he was put in last night," remarked Burt to the other guard, who was impassive and somewhat stupid.

"That's what I heerd, too," replied the latter, "but I don't know whether it's so or not."

"I wonder if the scamp has made up his mind to starve to death," continued Burt. "He's true grit clear through, but I don't believe he's got the nerve to do that."

"I don't think so either," observed the other, who didn't think much about it.

Looking around, Burt found that those who had been lounging near had taken their departure, and no one beside the other guard was in sight.

"Let's take a peep at the show," said Burt.

"Better not," replied his friend, "for I don't believe the General will like it."

"What's the reason he wouldn't? He told us not to let anyone else see him, and we ain't a goin' to, but bein' as how we're his guards, it's our duty to look arter him."

"I guess you're right; I didn't think of that."

Having fortified himself by the consent of the other guard to the breach of duty, Burt hesitated no longer to carry out his mean purpose. Drawing open the door he peered into the dark interior, all the darker because it took some minutes for his eyes to become accustomed to the change from the glare of sunlight. He failed to see the captive, and called out in his gruff voice:

"Halloo, Iron Heart, are you thar?"

Of course there was no response to this rude summons. Believing he detected the outlines of the chief in the further corner Burt continued:

"You're a fine specimen of the Iroquois Injin, ain't you? You're brave enough when you've got women and children to fight, but when a man's around, you're powerful ready to knock under and give up your weapons. If I was you, Iron Heart, I'd stick my head in the first hole I could find and never——"

When Burt Pendleton believed he saw the Seneca standing in the corner, he was mistaken. To use a single word, that which he observed was a phantasmagoria.

Iron Heart was crouching in the gloom on the left of the guard, and all unsuspected by him stole swiftly and noiselessly toward him.

The hunter had reached the point in his taunts where I have marked the dash, when he thought the house had fallen on him.

The other guard, a few paces off, was looking at the back of Burt and listening to his words, which had a hollow sound, as they were spoken into the room, when he was amazed to see Burt suddenly go over on his back, with his legs pointing toward the sky, at which he continued to kick with the vigor of a wounded lion, but without any effort toward climbing to the upright posture.

At the same instant a dark form, as if from a catapult, shot through the door, and before the stupid sentinel could comprehend what it all meant Iron Heart had reached the shelter of the adjoining wood and was beyond possible pursuit.

Just as the mystified spectator was beginning to understand matters Burt Pendleton stopped kicking at the stars, and slowly assuming a sitting posture, looked around.

"What's the matter?" he asked, still confused; "what has took place?"

"Why, I think Iron Heart must have struck you——"

"Where is he?" demanded the hunter, now fully recovered, springing to his feet and running to the open door. "If you don't look out the varmint will get out."

"Will get out!" repeated the other; "he got out long ago."

"What!" roared Burt; "how come you to let him do that? What war you thinkin' 'bout?"

"I didn't open the door," said the other, rousing under the unjust charge of his friend. "You opened it and was talkin' to him, when he must have fetched you a crack that sent you heels over head; he come right arter you, and struck into the woods afore I exactly knowed what war goin' on."

"Wal, if that don't beat everything," muttered Burt, peeping in the interior of the cabin, with a desperate hope that his companion might be mistaken. "Yas, he's gone, and we'll have a tough time to fix it with the

General, but we must patch up some kind of a story, or it will go hard with us."

But when General Greenfield came to learn the truth, as he did very soon, he quickly saw who was blameable, and he visited punishment on the proper party. Burt Pendleton, having set Iron Heart free, was compelled to take his place.

"You will stay there, too," thundered the indignant officer, "till you get a little sense in that thick head, and I presume that will take a month at least."

The hunter would have undergone every minute of that imprisonment, if not a longer one, but for an unexpected occurrence.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

WHILE General Greenfield was dealing out punishment to the jailer who had betrayed his trust, Iron Heart, as you may suppose, improved to the utmost the liberty that he had secured by his daring exploit. Not a shot was fired after him as he sped like a whirlwind through the wilderness. Recalling that he had given orders for the reassembling of the warriors at the old Council Ground, he made for that point.

He was without any weapons, but that was a small matter, since he could readily get all he wanted as soon as he reached his people.

So rapidly did he travel through the forest that he arrived on the scene shortly after Benny Morris, who, as you have been shown, was so precipitate in delivering his message that he therefore placed himself in personal peril.

The arrival of Iron Heart at the camp fire when the vagrant Pete was on the point of slaying the lame boy was not more timely than it was when the infuriated Leaping Horse refused to believe the message he brought.

But here was the Iroquois leader himself, and who should dare dispute his word?

Benny was thunderstruck. For an instant he could not believe his senses. He stared at the Seneca, unable to speak, until the chief did that which the lad did the evening before—extended his hand, and, grasping that of the youth, said:

“Iron Heart is glad to meet his son.”

“And, Iron Heart—I’m telling you the truth—I am glad to meet you here among your own people.”

It was the truth. Apart from the self-evident fact that his presence guaranteed Benny’s safety, the latter was relieved beyond expression to see the splendid leader among his own people, for he felt from the first that it was a most serious mistake to hold him captive.

He had said nothing of his belief to Gen-

aral Greenfield, but he meant he should hear it soon. Instead of cowing the Iroquois, the imprisonment of their chief would inspire them to tenfold daring. The lad was certain that, if the officer persisted in holding him captive, there would be such a furious attack on the settlement and blockhouse that they could not withstand the onslaught; and though it might mean the death of Iron Heart, yet it would be he that would insist on the vengeance at the cost of his life.

But was not the situation precisely the same since the prisoner had not been set free, but had effected his own escape?

That was the question which must soon be answered.

Iron Heart was loved as well as feared by his followers, as shown by their crowding around him to listen to the story of the indignity he had suffered. Their feelings were so stirred that he had but to say the word for them to rush like a cyclone to avenge him.

But he was not yet ready to sound the call. He told them he had one friend among the hated palefaces, and he pointed at Benny

Morris, who, supported on his crutch, listened to the words of his dusky ally.

The lad was thrown into dismay by the declaration of the chief that, although he had just escaped from captivity, he meant to take the lame lad back to his friends. Benny's dread was that if Iron Heart attempted to do this it would bring him in collision with Orris Ouden again.

How could he avert such a meeting, which was sure to prove fatal to one of the parties?

The chief asked Benny where he had left his boat. The boy said it was a little way down stream, but, inasmuch as he had the current and plenty of daylight in his favor, he would not trouble his father to paddle for him. Iron Heart added that he would go with him, and the lad understood the red man too well to repeat what he had said.

Fortunately Orris Ouden was stealthily watching proceedings all this time, and when he caught a glimpse of the chief escorting the boy to the canoe he suspected the amazing truth and kept out of the way. It would have been easy for him to shoot down Iron

Heart even before he entered the boat, the same chivalry that had restrained his son before prevented him doing such a cowardly thing, for he observed that, although Iron Heart had been among his warriors, yet he had not so much as secured a hunting knife, and was therefore powerless to defend himself.

Benny Morris resumed his old seat in the prow of the boat, looking earnestly in the painted face of the chief, who silently pulled the paddle, and asked himself whether it was wise to utter the thoughts that were pressing on him so hard. He was loath, and yet something impelled him to say the words on which so much depended.

"My father," he finally ventured, rounding himself to the effort, "will not close his eyes to the words of his son, for the Great Spirit urges him to speak."

He paused and waited for something from the Iroquois before continuing.

"The words of Iron Heart's son are now in his ears."

Could a better invitation have been given? The brave lad hesitated no longer.

"My heart was sad when I saw my father a captive, but the Great Spirit did not forget him. The Great Spirit set him free that he might speak the truth to the Iroquois. If Iron Heart leads his warriors on the war trail he will kill many palefaces, but they are like the leaves on the trees; they will spread over the land and drive all the red men into the great water. My father, will you not be wise, as the Great Spirit wants you to be? Will you not send your warriors to their villages and bury the hatchet? Will you not live in peace beside the palefaces when there is abundant land for all? My father, if you will do this, the Great Spirit will smile on you, and you and all your people will be happy. Let my father ask the Great Spirit to tell him in louder words what he wants him to do. My father, I have spoken."

Benny awaited anxiously for the response to this appeal, but he took it as an unfavorable sign that there was none. The lad was too wise to press him, and the rest of the voyage passed in silence.

Benny's anxiety now took a new turn. He

expected, as a matter of course, that the chief tain would set him ashore far enough from the blockhouse and pickets to make it safe for himself, but to his astonishment he paddled straight to a point in full sight of the frontier fort, and then walked forward as if he had decided to surrender himself again into custody.

But that was impossible, though what he really did was hardly less surprising.

Presenting himself to the dumfounded guards, he told them he wished to see General Greenfield. Benny made as if to withdraw but the chief would not permit.

General Greenfield, as you may well suppose, was astonished when he gave orders to bring the terrible visitor into his presence. Observing he was unarmed, the officer laid his own weapons aside, courteously saluted and asked the chief to be seated.

Iron Heart paid no heed to the invitation but remained erect, and spoke in a low voice devoid of all excitement :

"Iron Heart comes to his paleface father because the Great Spirit has sent him. Iron

Heart dug up the hatchet, and he and his warriors took the war path, and meant to fight till they drove the palefaces from their hunting grounds. But Iron Heart has heard words whispered in his ears which he never heard before. They were spoken by the Great Spirit, and they told Iron Heart he was displeased. They told him to wash off his paint and bury the hatchet.

"Iron Heart has done so. He wishes to do what the Great Spirit tells him to do. Iron Heart comes to his paleface brother and tells him he will be his brother. The hunting grounds are broad enough for the white and red men, and the Great Spirit wishes them to live in peace. Let us be brothers!"

General Greenfield stepped impulsively forward and extended his hand. His eyes were moist, as he said :

"The words of Iron Heart have sunk deep in my heart; they make me glad; we shall be brothers; let Iron Heart go back to his warriors and tell them the palefaces will be their friends; let him take a present from me that will tell him, when he is hunting in

the woods, of his brother in the fort, and make him feel he will always be his brother, and his heart will be glad when he can do aught for Iron Heart and his people."

Withdrawing for a moment, the officer quickly reappeared with a beautiful silver-mounted rifle, presented to him a couple of years before by General Washington himself. This was handed to the Iroquois, who showed his delight in accepting the valuable token.

"This change in Iron Heart is almost too wonderful to be believed," added the delighted General Greenfield, "but I know it is genuine. What is the cause, my brother?"

The grim features of the iron warrior relaxed, and, placing his hand on the head of Benny Morris, he said, in a low voice, with just a trace of huskiness:

"My son—it was the words which he read to Iron Heart from the Book of the Great Spirit; he will come to the wigwam of Iron Heart and read to him again, will he not?"

"You may depend upon it I will," said the happy lad. "I can't hunt and shoot like

the great chief and his warriors, but I can sit in his lodge and play with his children; I can read to him and his squaw, and I can tell him about the Great Spirit and a good many things which will please them all. Depend upon it, my father, your son will be there."

All the pledges made at that singular interview were kept. Iron Heart returned to his warriors and dispersed them to their homes. He told them the Great Spirit had whispered in his ears to do so, and nothing could prove more strikingly his matchless sway over the turbulent warriors that had rushed so eagerly to the warpath than the fact that his unexpected command was obeyed without protest from anyone.

And during the years that followed, Benny Morris spent many happy days and nights in the wigwam of the famous war chief of the Iroquois, who had two sons that promised to be worthy successors of the wonderful hunter and warrior. No one was as welcome as the lame lad, who went back and forth, without weapon of any kind, generally carried most

of the way thither by his big brothers, and helped back by the youthful warriors or by the father himself.

No sight could be more touching than that of this remarkable boy, seated in the lodge of the chieftain with his family and perhaps several warriors gathered around, while he told them of the countries beyond the sea, of the strange people that lived there, and, more marvellous still, the story of the Babe of Bethlehem, of the manger, of the cross, the crucifixion, and the death of the blessed Saviour of mankind.

And the good seed that was sowed by that humble toiler in his Master's vineyard never shall be fully known until revealed in the light of the resurrection morn.

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